

Sandra Bingham is a teaching fellow at the University of Edinburgh. Her publications include articles on aspects of the praetorian guard and on the Severans. Other interests include the rediscovery and reception of Carthage, Roman imperial women and the concept of imperial retreats.

‘Sandra Bingham’s new book is an attractively written assessment of a military force which was central to political events at Rome, providing close protection for the emperor and his family, and accompanying him in his campaigns on the frontiers. The author’s compelling narrative brings before us the officers and soldiers on duty at the imperial palace and in their fortified encampment on the outskirts of the city. This is a most welcome evocation of the Praetorians and their world that will appeal to specialists and general readers alike.’

– **Lawrence Keppie, Emeritus Professor of Roman History and Archaeology, University of Glasgow**

‘Sandra Bingham’s book is a much-needed and valuable history of the praetorian guard from its origins to its disbandment by the emperor Constantine the Great in AD 312. It covers the history, organization and duties of the guard with full notes and bibliography. There is no full-length treatment of the praetorian guard in English, so this book will be greatly appreciated by classical historians, Roman military historians and students of Roman history. Clear and concise in style, supported by ancient and current secondary sources, Bingham’s study is balanced in its treatment of an often partisan subject.’

– **Sara Elise Phang, author of *Roman Military Service: Ideologies of Discipline in the Late Republic and Early Principate***

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THE PRAETORIAN GUARD

A History of Rome's Elite Special Forces



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‘Sandra Bingham explores the idea that the praetorians were much more than the emperor’s bodyguard. They had a role in maintaining state security, policing large gatherings, fire-fighting, arresting and sometimes executing suspects, and occasionally even spying for the emperor. And by the second century AD they had developed a battlefield role since part of the guard usually accompanied the emperor on campaign. As the praetorians were stationed in Rome close to the emperor and under the control of his right-hand man, the praetorian prefect, they were inevitably drawn into the political intrigue and power struggles of the imperial court. Bingham’s fast-paced though carefully constructed narrative, backed up by sound analysis of crucial issues, expertly conveys the reader through this blood-thirsty and exciting tale, which highlights important issues in the wider history of the Roman world. Detailed notes make the book a

valuable tool for students and scholars, while general readers will welcome its crisp and clear style and eye for intriguing details of life in the guard.'

– Brian Campbell, Professor of Roman History, Queen's University, Belfast

'Sandra Bingham's *The Praetorian Guard* considers how the Roman elite military unit shaped Roman history, protecting, counseling, removing and replacing various emperors. Bingham neatly explains the history of the Guard, detailing the forerunners of the unit in republican Rome, such as the private cohorts of Sulla, Marius, Catiline, and even Cicero himself. She considers the status of the guard in Roman society, where and how it was physically stationed in the city, as well as the unit's internal organization, offering also salient comments about the guard as a fighting unit. Bingham's copious notes do not slow down the narrative but allow the studious reader to pursue sundry points in fuller detail. All in all, a valuable contribution to Roman history generally and specifically to Roman imperial rule, the household of the emperor, and the person of the emperor himself.'

– R. Alden Smith, Professor of Classics, Baylor University

SANDRA BINGHAM

THE
PRAETORIAN
GUARD

A History of Rome's Elite Special Forces

I.B. TAURIS

LONDON · NEW YORK

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This book is dedicated to the memory of my parents, Alfred (1914–1994) and Adelaide (1923–2012), whose love of learning led me to this path.

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PREFACE

This book is based partly on my research on the guard under the Julio-Claudians (University of British Columbia, 1997) and partly on research conducted since then, which now has led to a course on the praetorians that I teach at the University of Edinburgh. Many people have supported me in the endeavour to see this project to fruition. I would like to single out in particular Tom Harrison, Greg Woolf, Jill Harries, Jon Hesk, Roger Rees, Roy Pinkerton, Keith Rutter, Allan Hood, Douglas Cairns, Ulrike Roth and Lucy Grig. An extra special thank you goes to Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones for the drawings but especially for the laughs when I most needed them. I am grateful also to the Canadian contingent, Ann Dusing, Charmaine Gorrie, Arden Williams, Kathryn Simonsen and Eve MacDonald for their unflagging conviction that I would eventually get this done. Thanks also to Kate Collingridge, Jill Shaw and Elaine Hutchison for putting up with me over the years. I am grateful as well to the reader for his insightful and very helpful comments. And finally to the students who took the course on the guard and learned to 'question everything', I hope you find at least some of the answers here.

The greatest debt is owed to my husband, Stephen, who never lost trust even in the darkest times. Without him, the guard would be only a distant memory. Thanks are not enough.

INTRODUCTION

The praetorian guard was one of the most distinctive features of Roman imperial rule. An elite unit of soldiers, these men mainly were responsible for the safety of the Roman emperor and his family, and were well rewarded for their loyalty.¹ They received a higher rate of pay than the rest of the army, they had better working conditions and their close relationship with the emperor singled them out as the most privileged group in the military. Under the republic, troops had not been allowed in the capital, and the presence of the praetorian guard in Rome under Augustus was one of the most striking – and visible – indications that the imperial period had begun.²

The genesis of the unit can be found in the republican period. In the early part of the first century BC, the praetorian cohort that had functioned as a bodyguard for commanders in the field began to change and to take on more administrative tasks. The civil wars that erupted shortly thereafter halted this progression, and the cohorts reverted to being primarily a military force. But when Augustus decided to institute an armed unit for his personal use, he brought together both aspects of the earlier republican guard, making his imperial praetorians function not only in a military but also in an administrative capacity. Throughout the Julio-Claudian period, reliance on these soldiers for tasks other than guarding the emperor and his family began to take shape, though this expanding role usually does not attract much notice in the sources.³ Even during the reign of Augustus, there had been a realization that having so many soldiers close to the capital meant they could be used in any number of situations requiring large numbers of trained personnel. The evolution of the praetorians into a unit that fought fires, provided security at the games and carried out political espionage can be explained by the practicality of making use of the troops in the city as part of the overall organization of civic administration. In fact, there would be few major changes in the unit until late in the second century AD, by which time the guard was firmly entrenched in the life of the principate, of the city and of the empire.

The placement of the praetorians in Rome and their close relationship with the emperor thus brought about the use of the guard

in what might be considered unexpected ways. Such modifications were driven largely by the necessity of accommodating the requirements of the government which, at this time, was essentially a dictatorship relying on the military for support.⁴ Although their primary function was to provide protection for the emperor and his family, from the beginning the praetorians were assigned to other duties related to imperial security. They acted as a strategic military force sent to deal with problems where other measures had proven ineffective, or where there was a need for covert activity. In its early history, a division of the guard, the *speculatores*, became specifically associated with clandestine action. Moreover, the praetorians were involved in the confinement and execution of those deemed to be a threat to the state. On the other hand, they were also part of the routine civic administration in the capital, assisting the *vigiles* in firefighting and acting as security at the games and theatre.⁵ They were also involved in a variety of other tasks, ranging from map-making to engineering works.⁶ The guard could be employed in these duties precisely because it was the emperor's personal unit and could therefore be adapted to whatever need he had of his soldiers.⁷ Throughout their history, the soldiers proved to be pragmatic concerning this relationship, carrying out whatever demands were made of them and showing themselves unwilling to put their privileged position at risk. Of course, sometimes this meant betraying the emperor himself when that position was perceived to be threatened.

By the end of the first century AD, though, other units such as the *frumentarii* had been introduced for tasks that the praetorians had hitherto carried out, and the guard itself was beginning to be used more frequently in the field as frontline troops.⁸ Cohorts took part in the campaigns in Dacia under Trajan and those on the Danube under Marcus Aurelius, for example. This does not mean that they were no longer active in the capital but rather that their remit had expanded as the emperors themselves began to take to the field. This was the case even after the creation in the early second century of the *equites singulares Augusti*, a mounted unit that served as an additional bodyguard in battle.⁹ It was only at the start of the reign of Septimius Severus (AD 193–211) that the guard of the first two centuries ceased to exist: they were cashiered and replaced with men from the legions. The rationale for this change was to allow the emperor to ensure the loyalty of the unit, though it also rewarded soldiers who had been supportive of Severus' usurpation of power. Although the name

continued to be used, the new praetorian guard bore little resemblance to that of the previous period and was much more aligned with the army as a whole, with most recruits coming from the provinces. Still a privileged unit with respect to pay and length of service, nevertheless the 'elite' nature of the guard had been swept aside by the inclusion of regular legionaries. But the hope that the praetorians would remain faithful to the emperor was in vain: instead, the unit played a pivotal role in the so-called 'crisis of the third century', being involved in the removal and accession of several emperors. And just over 100 years after the Severan changes, Constantine disbanded the unit entirely: after 350 years, the praetorian camp was silent.

Information about the praetorians in the ancient literary sources is often limited. This is partly because it was not to the emperor's advantage that their activities be made public, but also because the extant sources usually have other interests on which to focus. It has been noted that '[The guard's] presence appears normally to have been taken for granted by contemporaries, as it has to be by us.'¹⁰ This makes the historian's job that much more challenging. The development of a military unit technically belonging to the army but superior to them in status and functioning as a separate entity answering only to the emperor did not lend itself to close scrutiny. The challenge is to try and identify the guard's role in the workings of the principate, and, in doing so, to consider in each case the attitude of the authors who did include them in their work.

The general problem with the literary sources in the imperial period has been well documented and only a brief overview need be made here.¹¹ Much of the information on the early history of the guard is derived from only three sources: Tacitus, Suetonius and Cassius Dio. Each of these clearly made use of those writers who had lived during the reigns of the early emperors, but the extent of the debt to each is difficult to ascertain, especially since it is only rarely that a named citation is provided. The praetorians appear in all of these authors, to varying degrees, but the references are often incidental, most commonly in passages which record events directly connected with the emperor. It is rare that a passage deals only with the praetorians.¹² Other sources such as Josephus, the younger Seneca and the elder Pliny provide occasional glimpses into the workings of the guard in the first century AD, but without comment on the significance of the praetorians in the events that they narrate.

The situation is even more complicated for the second century. There are few extant sources at all and those that remain often are fragmentary, as is the case with Dio for the first half of the century.¹³ The unreliability of the *Historia Augusta*, a group of biographies beginning with Hadrian, only complicates matters.¹⁴ From Marcus Aurelius onwards, the material is better, though for much of this period Dio is available only in epitomes. Herodian, writing in the mid-third century, is complete but presents problems of his own.¹⁵ The result is that, with the exception of the fuller accounts of the first century AD, there really is very little material in the written sources on which to rely for information about the guard.

In fact, the praetorians figured more prominently in the history of imperial Rome than might be surmised from a preliminary reading of the extant literary sources. Unfortunately, the material sources do not provide too much help either. Numismatic evidence for the guard is not plentiful: there are a few coins illustrating its close relationship with the emperor in its early history in particular, but in general, praetorians are not singled out.¹⁶ The archaeological remains of the praetorian camp, the *Castra Praetoria*, in many ways provides more questions than answers (see [Chapter 3](#)). And for issues such as number of cohorts and effective (that is, the number of men per cohort), while there is epigraphic evidence attesting to the careers of the officer class, the inscriptions do not reveal much about matters to do with the day-to-day management of the unit. Military diplomata fall into the same category (see [Chapter 3](#)). All in all, then, the material record adds some but not much to the overall picture.

Since the publication of the monumental work by Marcel Durry in 1938, *Les Cohortes Prétoriennes*, followed closely by Alfredo Passerini's *Le Coorti Pretorie*, there have been few comprehensive studies of the guard and none easily accessible in English.¹⁷ Recent works in German, Spanish and French are virtually inaccessible to an English-speaking audience.¹⁸ General books on the army mention the unit, but usually only as imperial bodyguards, with rarely any mention of duties beyond that key responsibility.¹⁹ A recent study on the praetorian prefects includes some incidental information on the guard in its discussion of the commanders.²⁰ Durry's work is still cited as the definitive study of the praetorians, and in fact most modern scholarship on the praetorians is based on material from his work. But much new evidence has emerged over the past 70 years, and there is a need for an updated survey. General histories of the empire usually

include information on the unit, but again only as the official bodyguard of the emperor, sometimes with reference to their privileged position in Rome. Biographies of emperors also make mention of the guard, though without much consideration of its role in the events of the reign. This is not surprising, since the focus of these studies is elsewhere, but it is also the case that such works can continue to perpetuate certain dated ideas about the praetorians.

The impression of the guard in modern culture is that of a unit associated with nefarious deeds, most notably the assassination and replacement of emperors. Rarely are the praetorians shown in any other light.²¹ In visual media, the series *I, Claudius*, originally broadcast by the BBC in the 1970s, provides an extensive treatment of the praetorians.²² In most episodes, they appear in the background, standing, watching, guarding, more part of the backdrop than active participants. Occasionally they are involved in intimidation of individuals and are seen as executioners, both elements attested in the ancient sources. Yet they rarely speak and for the most part are seen only as the visual representation of imperial power, clad in their full armour with the distinctive 'Attic'-style helmets (see [Chapter 3](#)). More recently, the movie *Gladiator*, set in the reign of Commodus, featured the guard throughout.²³ Most notably, the praetorians are shown as a fighting force in the opening scene; throughout the rest of the film they are seen in various guises, but always as the bad guys. One scene in particular, however, rings true, namely when praetorians are sent to arrest the senator Gracchus, played by Derek Jacobi. The soldiers, marching up to the villa, are spotted by a slave who then informs his master that they are approaching; Gracchus' response – sending the slave indoors and quietly going with the praetorians – represents an accurate picture, though fictional, of what is reported occasionally in the ancient sources.

In print, given the number of novels that deal with imperial Rome, praetorians make a regular appearance. A good example is the series of Roman detective novels by Lindsay Davis, the so-called Falco series, with 21 volumes in all so far (1989–2012). Some books focus more tightly on the guard, for example, *Optimus: Praetorian Guard* (2006) by P.M. Prescott or *Praetorian* by Simon Scarrow (2011). In the former, a guardsman becomes a Christian and part of a group lobbying for a Christian emperor; it is set in the first century AD. The second novel is one of intrigue, set in AD 50: the guard must be infiltrated because of its republican sentiments. In such cases, any adherence to historical

veracity is incidental, but the reader clearly knows that when choosing to read fiction.

But it is on the internet that so much misinformation about the historical guard is being disseminated today. In particular, the role of the guard as ‘king-maker’ is prevalent on many of the websites that mention the praetorians, though often with incorrect details or exaggerations based on common misconceptions. For example: ‘In Real Life [sic], the Praetorian Guard was a special force originally intending to serve as a Roman general’s bodyguard in combat, but the term was later restricted to the elite personal guard of the Roman Emperors. As a bodyguard unit, they proved to be a miserable failure. Nine separate emperors were killed by the guard, and many others were deserted or otherwise messed over by them. In some cases, the Guard literally sold the Impeial [sic] office to the highest bidder, then turned on their new master when he faield [sic] to deliver on his extravagant promises.’²⁴ Generalizations are also common: ‘Both Praetorian prefects and common soldiers of the Guard tended to be vicious, ambitious, and extremely arrogant, far more dangerous to the average citizen than any law-breaker.’²⁵ That there is such a widespread interest in the praetorians online is gratifying; what is problematic is how much of what is out there is simply wrong.²⁶

The purpose, then, of the present work is to set the praetorians into a context that tries to look objectively at the ancient sources, such as they are, and to challenge modern misunderstandings. In the following chapters, the history, organization and duties of the guard will be examined in some detail in order to present a comprehensive picture of this unit. Where areas have been covered thoroughly by other scholars (equipment, for example), little has been said. The main interest lies in establishing how the guard developed from the force that Augustus incorporated early in his reign as his personal army, for his own protection, to one that permeated all aspects of life in the capital until their demise in AD 312. That such a group existed should not surprise anyone. After all, most governments whose authority relies on intimidation by the military have had an elite force which functions in a similar fashion. Imperial Rome was no different.²⁷

HISTORY

The imperial praetorian guard was not an invention of the first emperor, but rather the modification of a republican institution. Prior to the establishment of the principate, there are several references to armed men acting as bodyguards for generals in the field, though it was not until the first century BC that the term *cohors praetoria* was applied in the sources to this type of unit, and the attribution was not then restricted just to the military sphere. But the basic idea remained the same: a corps of men chosen by the commander to be his guard and often to assist him in other capacities.

Republic

It is difficult to detect the date at which a group that properly can be termed a praetorian cohort first appeared in the republic. Livy indicates that the dictator Postumius had a specially chosen cohort as a guard in the early fifth century BC, which would provide a very early date indeed.¹ But the first use of the term is later connected with a Scipio: 'The cohort was called praetorian, because it was associated with the praetor. For Scipio Africanus was the first to choose the bravest men, who were never far from him in war. He freed them from the other duties of military service and they received one and a half times the pay.'² A consideration here must be the date at which Festus was writing, which makes the veracity of the passage difficult to assess.³ Moreover, it is uncertain whether Festus was referring to Scipio Africanus Maior or to his adopted grandson, Scipio Aemilianus Africanus Numantius. Livy is often cited in support of the former: Africanus is said by that author to have taken a bodyguard with him from Spain to Sicily in 205 BC. Complicating the issue, however, is the fact that the term *cohors* is not used specifically in reference to the men chosen by him to serve in this capacity.⁴ Though their purpose seems to correspond well to that of the praetorian cohort in the first century BC, the fact that they are unarmed, and the absence of any specific reference to *cohors*, prevents any secure correlation to be drawn with the text from Festus.⁵ Furthermore, the origin of the designation 'praetorian' for the unit around the commander is controversial. The word clearly is related to *praetor*, though whether in connection with that official as a general in the field or as the

governor of a province is unclear; the term also may be associated with the general's tent (*praetorium*) in the camp, near which a guard would be stationed.⁶

By the early first century BC, when the republic had begun to undergo radical changes and the emphasis had shifted from the security of the state to the safety of the individual, personal bodyguards became a necessity. Sulla, for example, is said to have had a large body of men protecting him when he became dictator in 82 BC.⁷ While the source for this is late, the way in which Sulla came to power would have made such a group necessary. It is not clear from the text, however, whether this force was solely military in composition: at the end of the second and in the early first centuries BC, there is evidence that the cohorts of various commanders were made up of friends and relatives rather than soldiers, though they still functioned as a bodyguard. Indeed the men around Scipio Aemilianus included volunteers along with clients and friends.⁸ Appian also links a similar corps – that is, a bodyguard composed of partisans – with the tribune Gaius Gracchus in the late second century BC.⁹ Guards like this must have been relatively common at the time: when Gaius Marius was in Africa fighting Jugurtha in 106 BC, the group around him is singled out as being military in composition rather than formed of partisans.¹⁰ Not surprisingly, given its nature, this type of unit continued into the imperial period and the term itself appears occasionally in Suetonius.¹¹ In fact, it has been argued that the *cohors amicorum* of the late republic eventually developed into the 'immediate entourage of the emperor wherever he may be'.¹²

The first explicit reference to a military cohort employed as a bodyguard and specifically designated 'praetorian' occurs in 62 BC. Marcus Petreius, the propraetor of North Italy, had been given command against Lucius Sergius Catiline, who had been declared an enemy of the state: 'When Petreius saw Catiline ... [he] led his praetorian cohort (*cohortem praetoriam*) into the middle of the enemy.'¹³ The traitor himself was associated with a praetorian cohort, but in a somewhat unexpected way; Cicero referred to Catiline's 'praetorian cohort of whores' in a speech against him in 60 BC.¹⁴ Clearly the term was familiar enough to Cicero's audience that the jibe would be understood. Nevertheless it is not clear how widespread the use of praetorian cohorts was in the mid-first century BC and indeed it is not certain that every general had his own unit. In 58 BC, Caesar took mounted infantry from the Xth legion as a personal guard when

he met with Ariovistus, king of the Suebi, for he was unwilling to trust his Gallic cavalry, and the terms of the meeting dictated that no infantry could accompany him. The terminology makes clear how he viewed this unit: 'Even if no one were to accompany him further, nevertheless he would go with the tenth legion only; he trusted it and it would serve as his praetorian cohort.'¹⁵ Given that it is not always clear where the men who made up such units at this time came from, this example – where the guard is comprised of soldiers taken directly from the legion – may confirm that they originated in the rank and file and consisted particularly of those men who were most reliable.¹⁶ Nevertheless, since this seems to be an ad hoc solution, it can be surmised that Caesar had no firmly established praetorian guard at this date.¹⁷ That he specifically refers to the men of the Xth legion as a praetorian cohort, however, clearly indicates that he was acquainted with such a unit, and yet there is no reference in Caesar's works to him having a regular detachment of praetorians despite the extensive narrative of manoeuvres and combat.¹⁸

Moreover, there is some flexibility in the first century BC in the use of the expression *cohors praetoria*, because governors of provinces had their own staff, often referred to in the sources by the same term. For example, in his speech against Verres, who had been governor of Sicily, Cicero makes several references to the governor's praetorian cohort, part of Verres' staff.¹⁹ Its members were used in many different tasks, in particular in a judicial capacity.²⁰ A similar type of unit is found with Cicero's brother Quintus when he was governor in Asia in 61–58 BC.²¹ Cicero himself, when governor of Cilicia, made use of a praetorian cohort for administration.²² On one occasion at least his *cohors praetoria* was actively engaged in battle.²³ In the late republic, then, a *cohors praetoria* could be either the armed bodyguard of a general or the administrative staff of a governor – both functions would be brought together in the guard of the imperial period.

The contenders who vied for power after the death of Caesar in 44 BC made use of bodyguards and, in some cases, these units are referred to as praetorian.²⁴ Octavian is said in this period to have gathered almost 10,000 men to serve as his guard, but the number is certainly an exaggeration.²⁵ When this group showed their unwillingness to fight against Antony, some declaring that they had come only as protection for Octavian, the latter had to resort to promises of rewards to entice them not to abandon him, though in the end only a few remained.²⁶ Antony himself had a contingent of men –

said to be those who were the best in body and character – chosen from his army to serve as his bodyguard on his march from Brundisium to Rome late in 44 BC; this must be what sources refer to as his praetorian cohort.²⁷ These may be the same men who fought for him at Forum Gallorum in 43 BC. In fact, at that battle, Antony is said to have had two praetorian cohorts, one that belonged to him and the other to Marcus Junius Silanus, who was either legate or tribune under Aemilius Lepidus.²⁸ Antony's opposition on that day also had two praetorian cohorts, provided by the consul Aulus Hirtius as additional protection for those marching from the camp to engage the enemy. Of these, it seems that one belonged to Hirtius himself, the other to Octavian.²⁹ It is clear that by the late 40s BC it was customary for every commander in the field to have a bodyguard, and that the term used by the sources to describe this group is *cohors praetoria*.³⁰

Later in 43 BC, after a reconciliation had been effected, Octavian, Antony and Lepidus entered Rome as triumvirs. Each was accompanied by both a praetorian cohort and a legion; the spectacle was enhanced by the fact that they entered Rome separately on three consecutive days.³¹ It has been suggested that the presence of praetorian cohorts with the triumvirs clearly distinguished them from the consuls.³² More importantly, of course, the triumvirs were no longer on campaign; while in the field, consuls had the use of a praetorian cohort, as seen with Hirtius above, but this unit was not allowed within the boundaries of the city of Rome. The triumvirs blatantly ignored this principle. That there should be troops in the capital was startling enough; the presence of a select force for each triumvir no doubt added to the unease of the citizens. Not only did the cohorts provide protection but, more importantly, they offered visible evidence of the power of each of the triumvirs. The reaction of the citizens was doubtless something that Octavian would remember when, as Augustus, he instituted the imperial guard.

There is no mention in the sources of praetorian cohorts at the battle of Philippi in 42 BC, though it is unlikely that they did not take part, and in fact there is numismatic evidence in support of their presence there. Coins associated with Octavian show three standards on the reverse with the legend COHORT PRAE PHIL; a winged Victory with a wreath and a palm is on the obverse, with the legend VIC AVG.³³ Moreover, Appian relates the story of Domitius Calvinus, a supporter of the triumvirs, who was conveying a praetorian cohort of 2,000 men (along with cavalry and other troops) across the Adriatic;

these were the men who had been with Octavian in Italy prior to him setting off for Greece.³⁴ It is likely they were intended to take part in the battle, but the ships were destroyed en route when the wind failed and they fell into enemy hands.³⁵

After the triumvirs' victory at Philippi, those soldiers who had served their time were released by Antony and Octavian. But of these, 8,000 opted to remain active and the two leaders divided them into praetorian cohorts.³⁶ It is not clear, however, how many units were created or their size. In 41 BC, it is recorded that Octavian made use of his praetorian cohorts when fighting against Lucius Antonius; these are most likely the cohorts organized after Philippi, though there is no specific evidence to that effect.³⁷ Moreover, Antony is said to have had three praetorian cohorts with him in 36 BC when he fought against the Parthians.³⁸ The importance of these soldiers to Antony is emphasized on a coin issued by him in 32 BC, with the legend CHORTIUM PRAETORIARUM; it provides the earliest physical evidence that we have for the term.³⁹ But there is no further information in the sources about these units. The division of soldiers into praetorian cohorts after Philippi has been called the '*véritable naissance*' of the guard.⁴⁰ The evidence shows, however, that even after that date commanders were not always protected by praetorian cohorts. For example, Octavian was attacked and nearly killed by soldiers for expelling one of their number from the games in the late 40s; there is no indication that any protection was in place for him at this event.⁴¹ And Plutarch records that in 35 BC, Octavia sailed to meet Antony in Greece, bringing with her 2,000 men to serve as his praetorian guard.⁴² It is not clear whether these should be considered an adjunct to the units he already had with him in the east, but the implication is that there was a need for additional troops, specifically for his protection.

It is probable that the praetorian cohorts of both Antony and Octavian were involved in the fighting at Actium in 31 BC. But the only evidence for their participation comes from a late source which records that Octavian had five cohorts with him.⁴³ After his victory, Octavian took over Antony's praetorian cohorts, releasing some of the soldiers and settling them in new colonies.⁴⁴ Before long, however, he had formed the majority of the soldiers from these cohorts into the imperial praetorian guard.

Augustus to Nero

It is clear that Augustus was influenced in the way in which he

structured his praetorians by the use of such units in the first century BC. It may well be, for example, that one of the key events was the entrance of the triumvirs into the capital with their praetorian cohorts: the appearance of armed guards with these men illustrated where the power resided and Augustus might have decided to replicate this. But there is, predictably, no indication in the sources of the rationale behind its establishment.⁴⁵ The precedent of the republican cohorts – both in a military capacity and in an administrative sense – may have provided the model, but there had to be some need for transforming what had been primarily a bodyguard in the field to the emperor's guard in the capital. It has been pointed out that '[Augustus] had no illusions about the enemies he had made in his revolutionary career', and perhaps one need look no further than that for an explanation.⁴⁶

The praetorians clearly were intended for the emperor's personal use. In his account of the military strength of the empire under Tiberius, Tacitus uses the term *proprius miles* in reference to the praetorian and urban cohorts: 'his own army occupied the city – three urban and nine praetorian cohorts, nearly all chosen from Etruria and Umbria, or old Latium and the old Roman colonies'.⁴⁷ Evidence for the closeness of this relationship between emperor and guard is provided by the language on diplomas issued to the praetorians, where the phrase *qui in meo praetorio militaverunt* ('those who served in my imperial guard') clearly illustrates the strong association.⁴⁸ Another way in which this link can be demonstrated is through the oath taken by the soldiers in the city. Given their proximity to the emperor, it is to be expected that there was a special oath for the praetorian and urban cohorts that confirmed their allegiance to the emperor and his household in a way that bound them more directly to him than were the provincial armies.⁴⁹ The devoted relationship between the emperor and his praetorian cohorts is shown further by the inclusion of his image on their standards, something not done by the legions where the image was carried separately. In addition, the emperor directly gave the watchword to the cohort on duty at the palace (see [Chapter 3](#)). That the unit also played a major role in the funeral of Augustus adds to this closeness.⁵⁰ All of these factors serve to illustrate that the guard was not just an integral part of imperial power but was linked inexorably to the emperor himself.

In considering what the praetorians did, however, it is important to emphasize at the outset that they were not restricted to serving as the

emperor's bodyguard. Augustus was resourceful in finding additional duties for them in an attempt to make better use of the only sizeable military force in Italy and to integrate the unit into the imperial administration. Indeed, he had another group that served almost exclusively to ensure his safety, the German bodyguard (*Germani corporis custodes*).⁵¹ It was Caesar who first had used Germans as an escort for his own security and it is possible that Augustus took over this idea from him.⁵² Primarily a cavalry unit, they have been referred to as the emperor's 'private militia'; it is apparent that, during their existence, they were used to complement the guard in the task of ensuring the emperor's safety.⁵³ Dismissed after the Varan disaster in AD 9, the German bodyguard is attested again in AD 14, when the pick of the unit was sent north to assist in quelling the revolt in Pannonia after the death of Augustus; evidently they were an invaluable element of the imperial system at this early stage.⁵⁴ But it may have been for reasons other than their skill that they were so relied upon: Tacitus claims that because of their foreign character, the Germans were used as the personal bodyguard of the emperor, for they had no political investment in Rome.⁵⁵ It is of note that the unit did not outlast the Julio-Claudians. They were disbanded by Galba in AD 69, who considered them to be a threat, since they allegedly had shown preference for his opponent, Gnaeus Dolabella.⁵⁶

The history of the guard, then, is intertwined closely with the early history of the principate: the presence of a considerable number of troops in Rome whose loyalty was to Augustus alone was a clear indication that the imperial period had begun.⁵⁷ In fact, until the major transformation brought about by Severus in the late second century AD, much of the way in which the unit was organized remained the same, with only minor changes to such features as the size and number of cohorts and the command structure (see [Chapter 3](#)). While the area of recruitment was broadened over the course of the first two centuries of the imperial period, the majority of guard members continued to come from Italy and those areas that had been colonized early on. The duties of the praetorians did begin to involve a wider remit, however, with increased action in the field becoming common after the Julio-Claudian period (see [Chapter 4](#)). But it is to the credit of Augustus that the way in which he structured the guard in the early years of his rule remained in place for so long.

Yet, despite the importance of the praetorians even in the early principate, very little is known about their activities during the reign

of Augustus. This lack of information is partly the result of the absence of a contemporary and comprehensive source for the reign. It is also of interest that Augustus does not refer specifically to the praetorians in the *Res Gestae*, the list of his achievements; the absence from the text of any mention of the establishment of the guard may stem from a reluctance to advertise quite so blatantly the way in which his power was maintained.⁵⁸ And by the end of the first century AD, the praetorians had become such an integral part of the functioning of the city that later authors did not give much thought to the early history of the unit. The absence of detail, however, makes it difficult to ascertain how extensive the responsibilities of the guard were under the first emperor. But there is some indication that many of the tasks for which there is evidence from the mid-first century were also undertaken in the earlier period. For example, when Augustus went east in 22/21 BC, the city was subjected to periods of unrest. There were riots over the consular elections, and stability was maintained only after the appointment of Agrippa to look after affairs in Rome.⁵⁹ Whether the praetorians were used to help quell such disturbances this early in their history is not known, but it is probable that those cohorts billeted in Rome at the time would have done so, given their proximity. Moreover, the presence of praetorians with the emperor on this trip is not recorded in the sources, though undoubtedly some soldiers went with him, given that accompanying the emperor was their primary function.⁶⁰

The other ways in which the guard was later employed – assisting with the fighting of fires, providing security at the games, dealing with prisoners – probably originated during the reign of Augustus, but again there are only hints of this in the sources. For example, Suetonius records that there were soldiers at the games, and that on several occasions troops were posted throughout the city, as after the Varan disaster of AD 9, but without specific reference to the guard.⁶¹ The involvement of the praetorians in firefighting is not specifically attested for Augustus' reign, but they must have taken part in battling any major blazes, especially before the organization of the *vigiles* in AD 6.⁶² The evidence for the guard being involved in executions under Augustus is meagre, but there was a precedent for such activity. While still a triumvir, Octavian had had the praetor Quintus Gallius removed from his presence by centurions and soldiers; he was tortured and then executed because Gallius was suspected to have been armed at one of the tribunals.⁶³ Suetonius also records the execution of a knight suspected of being a spy because he had been taking notes during one

of Octavian's speeches to the soldiers and the citizens.⁶⁴ Such tasks would be precisely the sort of assignment expected of the guard. Yet the situation under Augustus was substantially different from that of the emperors who came after him: the presence of an armed force in the city, while not unknown, was still unusual. The lack of information, then, about the movements and responsibilities of the praetorians in this reign can be attributed partly to a desire by Augustus to downplay their role in the running of the state.

Furthermore, it is not easy to reconstruct the method of command for the guard before 2 BC, the date at which Augustus appointed the first two prefects. Prior to that time, the tribunes of the cohorts must have received their orders directly from the emperor.⁶⁵ The reluctance to delegate responsibility for the guard to any one individual in the early years of the reign may have resulted from a desire to deflect criticism for having stationed troops in the city; by 2 BC, there would have been less concern about their presence. Yet in this early period, the power later associated with the office of prefect was not evident because the role of the guard was still developing. Moreover, it is not certain that the position was first and foremost military in nature: whether the prefects were armed in the presence of the emperor is unclear and in fact the position was always as much political as military.⁶⁶ This is seen most clearly in the influential relationship between emperor and prefect, and in the way in which these individuals were chosen for the post – most often through patronage.⁶⁷ As the responsibilities of the praetorians expanded, however, it was only logical that the position of prefect would take on additional significance, as is well documented.⁶⁸

It is uncertain how the first men who were appointed to the position were chosen, and in fact very little is known about them other than their names.⁶⁹ Quintus Ostorius Scapula's career is obscure; he seems to have been the brother (or cousin) of the Publius Ostorius Scapula who was prefect of Egypt under Augustus and whose descendants gained the consulship under Claudius.⁷⁰ About the other prefect, Publius Salvius Aper, nothing is known.⁷¹ The issue of collegiality here is an important one, for Augustus evidently saw a need for the office to be shared, and it is usually assumed that having two prefects allowed one to stay in Rome while the other could be elsewhere.⁷² But the reason for this decision is more pragmatic than most historians appreciate: it was undoubtedly to facilitate the supervision of the cohorts in this early period, since they were not yet

housed together, being widely dispersed in the city. In fact, the practice of having two prefects is not followed consistently throughout the long history of the prefecture, and it is a mistake to think that this was the 'norm' for the position.⁷³ Dio's claim about the collegiality of the office as characterized in the dramatic speech presented by Maecenas to Augustus – that it is dangerous to entrust the post to a single individual – clearly reflects the benefit of hindsight, since there was no precedent for such a fear at the time of the establishment of the prefecture.⁷⁴ It is equally of interest that Augustus chose equestrians for this office. The reason may be found in their responsibilities: because the praetorians functioned as the emperor's personal guard, to have put members of the senatorial aristocracy in charge of such a unit would have created friction between them and the *princeps*, and perhaps be dangerous for the emperor; equestrians posed less of a threat, given their more modest status.⁷⁵

The rationale for the transfer of direct control over the guard from the emperor to the prefects is not recorded in the sources.⁷⁶ In fact, there may be a practical explanation for the transfer of power, namely the inability of the emperor to continue to oversee the day-to-day command of the cohorts himself, especially since the praetorians were becoming involved in so many different activities in the capital. A command structure was necessary to coordinate these tasks, and it is likely that the movement of the tribunes through the system did not allow for long-term commands to be established.⁷⁷ The orders for the soldiers would have continued to originate from the palace, however, where it is likely that the prefects had their headquarters.⁷⁸ It is clear, however, that the emperor maintained overall control of the guard, since it remained his personal army.

The guard under the Julio-Claudian emperors quickly matured into the force that is regularly documented in general accounts of Roman imperial history. There were several important developments in this period: the construction of a permanent camp for the unit – the *Castra Praetoria* – under Tiberius, and the use of the guard on a recurring basis to remove those deemed a threat to the principate are perhaps the most important of these.⁷⁹ Of course, members of the praetorians were involved in the assassination of Gaius in AD 41; they also played a significant role in the accessions of Claudius and Nero and, in a more subtle way, those of Tiberius and Gaius. A closer look at these events, therefore, is required.

Following the deaths of Augustus, Tiberius and Claudius, the guard

assisted in the way in which information about these events was made public. In each case, an individual ensured that arrangements were in place for the accession of the chosen successor with the help of the praetorians. For Augustus, the agent was his wife Livia, who acted in concert with the guard to make certain that news of the emperor's death was delayed until such time as the transition of power was secure: Tiberius was on his way to Dalmatia at the time and it is not clear from the sources whether he returned to find Augustus alive or dead.⁸⁰ The empress stationed praetorians around the house in Nola so that no one could approach; it is likely that they were used as well to convey the message of Augustus' decline to Tiberius, given the need for strict secrecy.⁸¹ The guard was employed again in AD 37 at the death of Tiberius in Misenum to convey news of his demise to the provinces; the role of his praetorian prefect, Macro, was key here. The use of *speculatores* in this instance would have provided him with feedback as to the reaction of the governors and thus allow him to gauge the attitude towards the new emperor.⁸² When Claudius died, as had happened with Augustus, the change occurred with the collusion of the empress, Agrippina, who was acting in the interests of her son, Nero.⁸³ Together with the prefect Burrus, she ensured a smooth transition of power.⁸⁴ Praetorians were used to restrict access to the palace until it was deemed an auspicious time to announce the death of Claudius and the accession of Nero.⁸⁵ But the guard also was a concern: it was not clear whether the praetorians would consent to the choice of successor (there being another possible candidate in the person of Claudius' son Britannicus), and Tacitus records that Burrus had to encourage the cohort on duty at the palace to show allegiance to the new emperor: 'Then, in the middle of the day, the third before the Ides of October, the doors of the palace suddenly were opened. With Burrus accompanying him, Nero went out to the cohort which, in military fashion, was present as the watch. There, at the prefect's encouragement, they cheered him and he was put into a litter. They say that there were some who hesitated, looking about and asking where Britannicus was; soon, with no other option, they followed what was on offer.'⁸⁶ It seems that even the best-made plans could not completely guarantee the loyalty of the unit at the transfer of power.

It is the assassination of Gaius, though, that has gripped historians, both ancient and modern.⁸⁷ As has been noted, the imperial praetorian guard had been developed by Augustus first and foremost for his own protection. Though the soldiers became involved in many other tasks after the establishment of the unit, the security of the

emperor still remained their primary function, the one to which all of the others were subordinated. It is remarkable, therefore, that, just over 50 years after their introduction, members of the praetorians were responsible for the assassination of the man they had sworn to protect. Yet, by AD 41, the guard was so firmly established as a vital part of the management of the state that several of its members were willing to risk their positions to help advance other political aims through the elimination of the emperor. It should be remembered, however, that the conspiracy was restricted for the most part to a few officers. It is possible that the close association of these men with the emperor and with the administration meant that they were more easily influenced by the political situation around them and were corruptible. Most importantly, they had easy access to Gaius through their personal contact with him. But the conspirators by no means represented the attitude of the entire force, which on the whole remained loyal to the emperor. Nevertheless, the success in carrying out the assassination brought an increased recognition by all involved in political life in Rome that the praetorians were a force to be reckoned with and, for the emperor, a potential threat.

Suetonius and Dio record that there had been other plots against Gaius before AD 41, but they provide few details.⁸⁸ It is clear, however, that by AD 40, discontent against the emperor was widespread among many in Rome; for example, it was in that year that Gaius was granted guards for his statues.⁸⁹ This displeasure also extended to members of the guard. The details of the conspiracy are obscure but praetorian officers appear to have been involved right from the beginning.⁹⁰ One of the major players was the tribune Cassius Chaerea.⁹¹ His participation is said by Josephus to have resulted principally from resentment at the many insults to which he had been subjected by the emperor, most of which were of a sexual nature.⁹² The inclusion of officers in the conspiracy suggests that the hostility against Gaius was rooted in something which had a direct effect on them rather than on the guard in general. It is impossible to say what their actual complaints against him might have been, but Josephus records that Chaerea, in a comment directed to one of the praetorian prefects, Marcus Arrecinus Clemens, and to Papinius, a fellow tribune, referred to the guard as 'torturers and executioners', which may provide a clue to the grievances felt by at least some of the officers.⁹³

The plot against Gaius was successfully executed in the January of

AD 41.⁹⁴ As might be expected, details of the assassination are obscure. Besides Chaerea, three other tribunes of the guard were involved: Cornelius Sabinus, Papinius and Julius Lupus, who was related to the prefect, Clemens.⁹⁵ Clemens himself was approached by the conspirators, though he did not agree to participate directly, ostensibly because of his age. It is not known whether the other prefect had knowledge of the plot; the sources do not even record his name.⁹⁶ The emperor was killed at the games on the Palatine, with the choice of the place and time dictated by Gaius' intention to sail to Alexandria soon after, though the crowd certainly made it more difficult for anyone to come to Gaius' assistance when he was attacked, despite the considerable number of soldiers in the vicinity.⁹⁷ A further consideration had to be the ability of the conspirators to separate Gaius from these men, in particular from his praetorian guard and German bodyguard, both of which were there specifically to protect him. This was made possible by isolating the emperor as he left the theatre around midday, which happened to be the time of the change of the guard.⁹⁸ Chaerea is said to have approached Gaius to ask him for the day's watchword. He attacked after receiving the reply.⁹⁹ There was no one to come to the emperor's aid except his litter bearers, who were ineffective. During the actual assassination, the majority of the praetorians on duty that day on the Palatine – whatever their responsibility – must have remained unaware of what was happening. That those in the theatre did not attempt to get to the emperor or try to follow the assassins can probably be attributed to the efforts of the ex-consul Valerius Asiaticus, who seems to have been given the role of calming those in the theatre.¹⁰⁰ In fact, it was the German bodyguard who first realized what had happened and who began to exact revenge. Exactly where they had been at the time of the assassination is not clear: although they should have been in close proximity to Gaius, it appears that they had not exited the theatre with the emperor.¹⁰¹ It is possible that those guard members involved in the conspiracy may have played a role in keeping the Germans from Gaius. But when it was discovered that the emperor had been killed, the Germans indiscriminately murdered anyone they happened upon and it was only with difficulty that they were prevented from wholesale slaughter by the supplication of the crowd still in the theatre. Gaius' family was also murdered. Lupus was sent immediately to kill the emperor's wife Caesonia and her child; the choice of the tribune for such a task was to implicate his relative Clemens, according to Josephus.¹⁰²

The involvement of the praetorians in the murder of Gaius is immensely significant in the history of the guard. This was the first time that the emperor's personal unit had taken part in an overtly political action. Although the impetus had come from some of the officers, and the reasons which led to the act remain unknown for the most part, it was inevitable that a few of the rank and file of the guard would be drawn in by the conspirators who needed their cooperation; the impetus was probably anticipation of a reward. On the other hand, the murder of Gaius by the very soldiers who had taken an oath to protect him signalled a transformation in the imperial attitude towards the guard. The emperor's personal troops had played an important role at the transition of power between Augustus and Tiberius, and between Tiberius and Gaius, by helping to ensure a smooth succession. Now, however, members from the same unit had been the primary means by which the next succession had taken place, through an act of murder, and the assassins were men who had been promoted by the emperor himself. Such a step demonstrated to all that the praetorians could have a huge impact in the political arena in Rome, and sent a clear message to Claudius, and to those who came after him, that praetorian officers in particular must be carefully chosen and closely monitored.

The actions of the guard after the murder are vague, for the account is garbled in Josephus and difficult to unravel. There are two versions. In the first, the praetorians decided at a meeting that they must provide their own candidate for emperor if they were to safeguard their position; their choice was Claudius.¹⁰³ The second records that the acclamation of Claudius occurred by accident when a soldier named Gratus stumbled upon him hiding in the palace as members of the guard were rampaging through it. The praetorian saluted Claudius as emperor, and along with the rest of the praetorians in the palace escorted him back to the camp.¹⁰⁴ There are problems with both accounts, however, and it is more likely that Claudius himself is implicated in the transfer of power, having prearranged with some of the conspirators (perhaps a group acting separately from Chaerea and his colleagues?) to be found in a certain place in the palace.¹⁰⁵ The role of the prefect Clemens should be taken into account here: although it is acknowledged that he did not play an active part in the assassination, it is feasible that, once informed, he alerted Claudius to the plot and assisted him in escaping after the assassination.¹⁰⁶ That the new emperor was discovered in a somewhat out-of-the-way place in the palace by a member of the guard lends

credibility to this scenario.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, it is unlikely that any plot would have succeeded with the knowledge of the prefect unless he had chosen to support the murder by throwing his support behind a designated successor.

Shortly after the assassination of Gaius, then, Claudius found himself in the praetorian camp under the protection of the entire guard. The next day, both the urban cohorts and the *vigiles* joined in swearing the oath of loyalty to the new emperor.¹⁰⁸ The urban cohorts may have accepted Claudius in the hope of receiving a reward from the new emperor, since the praetorian guard had been promised a considerable donative by him for their loyalty.¹⁰⁹ The grant of a donative upon a change of emperor was not unusual, though Suetonius records this particular instance as setting a precedent because it was not associated with Gaius' will, an interpretation that has been accepted by many scholars.¹¹⁰ Yet a similar transaction had happened before. Upon his accession, Gaius had doubled the amount left to the praetorians by Tiberius and it can be argued that this was the first time a reward had been given to the guard in exchange for its loyalty in the future.¹¹¹ It is true, however, that the donative given by Claudius was unusual in that its size was larger than any previously bestowed, being five times the annual salary for a praetorian.¹¹² It has been suggested that, rather than the purchase of loyalty, the grant was made in lieu of any bequest from Gaius, but it seems clear that Claudius was interested in rewarding the praetorians for their role in his succession.¹¹³ Further evidence for this comes from two coin types issued by Claudius; the first, with the legend IMPER RECEPT, shows the praetorian camp with a figure holding a spear and standing in front of a standard.¹¹⁴ The other coin depicts Claudius clasping hands with a soldier who has a shield and carries the standard; the legend reads PRAETOR RECEPT.¹¹⁵ They first were minted in AD 41–2, but the type was reissued throughout the first few years of Claudius' reign and must have been intended to reinforce the importance of the praetorians in his rule.¹¹⁶ The guard also was given 100 sesterces per man on the anniversary date of Claudius' accession.¹¹⁷ There can be little doubt that Claudius understood the need not only to continue to show his gratitude to the praetorians but also to keep the measure of their support for him before the senate and the people.¹¹⁸

One of Claudius' first acts was to execute Chaerea for his involvement in the conspiracy.¹¹⁹ Of the other tribunes involved, only Lupus was put to death. Since by this time the emperor had assured

himself of the support of the guard, the execution of these officers was not likely to result in any resentment. In fact, the attitude of the praetorians after the murder, as it had been during crises in the past, was one of pragmatism. It is possible that for many of the soldiers the change in emperor was of limited significance. As long as their needs were looked after and they were well rewarded for their continued loyalty, there was little incentive to get involved in political intrigue.

The history of the guard in the early first century, then, is one of gradual development: the institution was changing and maturing into the force that later authors such as Tacitus would recognize. It was in this period that the organization of the unit became well established and the duties with which the praetorians would be associated were sanctioned (see [Chapter 4](#)). In addition, the office of praetorian prefect began to assume the importance that it would later have.¹²⁰ The men who held the position in the first century were not chosen for their military ability; as has been noted, most often their appointments were the result of imperial patronage, which meant that they were selected because of their affiliation with the imperial household rather than for any particular ability to manage such a large military force. The reason for this was simple: the emperor needed to know that someone he could trust implicitly was in command of his guard, for the greatest danger he could potentially encounter would come from the armed men who had sworn to protect him.

Two prefects of note from this period are Quintus Naevius Cordus Sutorius Macro, already mentioned in connection with the accession of Gaius, and Sextus Afranius Burrus, who held the office under Nero. The conditions under which Macro was appointed praetorian prefect are not clear; he played a crucial role in the downfall of Sejanus in AD 31 and it is possible that he had been promoted to the office in connection with this event.¹²¹ Macro remained sole prefect for the rest of Tiberius' reign, an indication that he was trusted by the emperor. But within a year of Gaius' accession, Macro had been removed from his position. The reason for the fall from favour is not known. At some time after the recovery from his illness in the autumn of AD 37, Gaius apparently indicated to Macro that he was to have a new position, that of prefect of Egypt.¹²² Such a transfer would remove him from the command that had the potential to do the greatest harm to the emperor and would isolate him from the capital and, perhaps more importantly, from the soldiers there. No doubt this precaution had something to do with Macro's actions when Gaius had been ill; it may

be that the prefect had gone beyond what the emperor thought appropriate. For example, among Macro's responsibilities at this time would have been the task of giving the watchword to the guard. Technically, though, this action would have placed the cohorts at Macro's disposal for whatever end he chose, and it may well have been the subsequent mistrust over the ambitions of his prefect that prompted Gaius to act. The move would have been viewed by Macro as a demotion. Though it was not until the Flavian period that a definite *cursus* was established for these prefectures, that the position of praetorian prefect included control of the guard and a place close to the emperor means that it must have been viewed as the premier position. Yet he did not make it to Egypt. Early in AD 38, the prefect and his wife, Ennia, committed suicide.¹²³ An accusation had been made against them, though the details are unclear.¹²⁴ It is possible that he was involved in a conspiracy, but the evidence is insufficient to draw any firm conclusions.¹²⁵ There is no indication that the guard itself was in any way implicated in Macro's downfall, and there is no record of its reaction to his removal.¹²⁶

The appointment of Burrus to the prefecture in AD 51 was due to the influence of Agrippina, the wife of Claudius; she argued that there was a need for stricter discipline with respect to the praetorians and that this would be accomplished more easily through the command of a single prefect.¹²⁷ It is not certain that there had been problems with the control of the guard, though Agrippina may have been able to use as an excuse the demonstration over food shortages which that same year had put Claudius in some danger in the Forum.¹²⁸ Of greater import to Agrippina than Claudius' security, however, the appointment of Burrus eliminated those prefects whom she perceived as having been supportive of the emperor's former wife, Messalina, and thus loyal to Messalina's son, Britannicus. With Nero now old enough to stand for office, Agrippina must have anticipated that the struggle between Nero and Britannicus would not be far off.¹²⁹ She obviously wanted to ensure that her partisans were in a position from which they could provide the greatest assistance.¹³⁰

Burrus was well known to the imperial family. From Vasio in Gallia Narbonensis, he had been begun his civil career as Livia's procurator and, after her death, was retained by Tiberius and Claudius.¹³¹ This connection with the imperial household would have brought him into contact with Agrippina, and his appointment as praetorian prefect should be viewed in that context.¹³² At some point, Burrus also was

awarded the *ornamenta consularia*, granting him the rank of consul without having held the office, a detail recorded on the inscription at Vasio but neglected by the ancient historians.¹³³ It is not clear when or why he was honoured in this way, though it is possible that his role in the accession of Nero provides the rationale. In connection with Seneca, Burrus managed the early career of the young emperor.¹³⁴ Nevertheless, he did not play an active role in what was the most significant event in those years, namely the murder of the emperor's mother.

Within a year of Nero coming to power, there was dissension between mother and son, and when Agrippina realized that her influence was waning she threatened to present Britannicus to the troops in the Castra Praetoria as Claudius' legitimate heir.¹³⁵ Her use of the praetorians in Nero's accession and her threat here illustrates that, for the empress, the guard was of paramount importance in determining the legitimacy of rule. The result of the intimidation by Agrippina, however, was that Nero banned her from the palace and withdrew the contingent of guards which accompanied his mother.¹³⁶ Since this escort was as much a show of status as for her protection, it made its dismissal all the more disturbing to her; it also meant that she could not influence the soldiers any longer.¹³⁷ Yet Agrippina survived another four years before Nero decided he had to get rid of her. It is unknown why he chose to act at this time, but Tacitus records that the emperor was simply tired of having her around.¹³⁸ The absence of the praetorians in the event is significant. From the earliest stages of the plan, it is clear that the guard was not considered as the agent of the murder, though by this time executions of a political nature, including members of the imperial family, had long been one of its functions.¹³⁹ Instead, the scheme originated with Anicetus, the freedman in charge of the fleet at Misenum. When Nero was young, this man had been his tutor, and Tacitus records that he had great hatred for Agrippina.¹⁴⁰ The fact that Anicetus had been able to attain the command of the fleet shows that he also had ambition. That the fleet was used in preference to the guard, then, must result from the fact that the scheme originated with their commander: a collapsible boat was to be built, which would result in the death of Agrippina upon its disintegration.¹⁴¹ But the plot failed and Nero, in fear of retaliation, sought the counsel of his advisors; when Seneca inquired of Burrus whether praetorians could be sent, the answer was no, that Anicetus must finish what he had started. Whether the explanation given – that the praetorians were loyal to the

imperial house and in particular to the memory of Germanicus, Agrippina's father – was the real reason or if it was annoyance at the use of the fleet rather than the guard is not clear. Had Burrus been prepared to make use of his men, it is certain that he could have found someone among those praetorians with the emperor at Baiae who would be willing to carry out the execution; as has been noted, guard members had done so in the past. In the end, Agrippina was murdered by officers of the fleet, who accompanied Anicetus to her villa; the crowd that had gathered in celebration of her escape from drowning were dispersed by the soldiers who were in the area, probably the praetorians who were with Nero.¹⁴²

There is no indication in the sources of the guard's initial response to the news that Agrippina was dead. If there was any uneasiness among the soldiers over the murder, the reality of the situation soon prevailed. The official version – that Nero had escaped an assassin sent by his mother – was accepted without hesitation.¹⁴³ Moreover, the day after the murder, the praetorians demonstrated their loyalty to the emperor in a display arranged by Burrus that was designed as well to assuage Nero's fear.¹⁴⁴ According to Dio, the emperor also granted the praetorians a donative after Agrippina's death, though the author's rationale for this – that they might expect more crimes to be committed – is not convincing.¹⁴⁵ It is more likely that Nero was acknowledging the importance of the praetorians to his rule and ensuring their continued support.¹⁴⁶

Yet it was also under Nero that the threat that had been inherent in the guard from the very beginning was realized when the praetorians abandoned their emperor.¹⁴⁷ The impetus came from one of their prefects, Gaius Nymphidius Sabinus.¹⁴⁸ Appointed to office in AD 65 after the exposure of the Pisonian Conspiracy, he also was awarded an honorary consulship, presumably for his role in bringing the plot to light.¹⁴⁹ When Nero went to Greece in AD 66, Nymphidius remained in Rome in command of those cohorts that did not accompany the emperor.¹⁵⁰ This gave him military control of the capital and it is possible that he made use of this opportunity to ingratiate himself with the soldiers. When Nero returned the next year, alerted to the danger of conspiracy by one of his freedmen, Helius, who had remained in Rome, he made a grand entrance, with the guard in full display.¹⁵¹ Yet, before long, Nymphidius was able to convince the praetorians that Nero had deserted them since a serious rival for the principate – Servius Sulpicius Galba, governor of Spain – had been

proclaimed by his troops in spring AD 68. This marks the first time that the rank and file of the unit as a whole had forsworn their oath and deserted an emperor, but it appears to have been made possible only because Nero's authority had been undermined while he was absent. By the time that the emperor returned from Greece, it is clear that the praetorians who had remained in Rome (that is, the majority of the unit) were extremely dissatisfied with him and that he needed to reassert his authority over them. Had he done so – appearing in the camp and addressing the soldiers – Nero could have regained control in Rome, since the praetorians had in the past chosen to support the status quo rather than risk their privileged position.¹⁵² In fact, Tacitus notes that the guard were led to desert Nero by the deception of its prefect rather than through its own impetus, for the praetorians always had maintained their loyalty to the Julio-Claudian house. But the emperor was either unwilling or unable to negotiate with his household troops in a timely fashion and, as a result, they were left with only the word of their prefect that the emperor had deserted them, which made their decision that much easier.

In addition, Nymphidius promised the guard a sizeable donative in Galba's name.¹⁵³ What is more, when he became disillusioned with the actions of the new emperor, in particular the appointment of Cornelius Laco as praetorian prefect, he attempted to subvert Galba's authority and be proclaimed emperor in his own right. The guard refused and Nymphidius was murdered in the *Castra Praetoria*.¹⁵⁴ This was the beginning of the involvement of the guard in the events of the so-called 'year of the four emperors' – their contribution would be significant, though overshadowed by the role played by the provincial legions.¹⁵⁵

AD 69

The choice of Galba as emperor had been decided by the troops in the field, but any ruler needed the support of the praetorians as well. After all, they had become so integrated into the workings of the principate that to neglect them would bring about massive discord. The new emperor, however, did not seem to recognize this. The bitterness of the guard at being denied the donative promised by Nymphidius, coupled with Galba's cruel treatment of the soldiers on the march to Rome and the dismissal of several officers from the city cohorts, resulted in much resentment among the soldiers.¹⁵⁶ Because of these problems, Marcus Salvius Otho, former governor of Lusitania and now one of Galba's confidants in Rome, was able to ingratiate

himself with the praetorians. He used bribery to gain their support; Tacitus records the gift of 100 sesterces – a substantial amount – to each member of the cohort attending Galba at dinner as an example of his tactics.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, after being overlooked as Galba's designated successor in the January of AD 69, Otho used his influence with the guard to convince them to switch allegiance to himself.¹⁵⁸ On the appointed day, though the cohort guarding the palace remained loyal for the most part, Galba was unable to defend himself against the praetorians and assorted legionaries that attacked him, and he was murdered in the Forum.¹⁵⁹ In the end, it was Galba's inability or unwillingness to accept that he needed the support of the troops in the city and that a donative, even a small one, had to be paid to them in order to establish this trust, which helped to bring him down.

Of course, the role that the guard had played in ensuring Otho's succession demanded recognition, and Tacitus records that the new emperor acquiesced to the demands of the soldiers. The guard requested the right to appoint its own prefects, the first time that choice had been granted to it.¹⁶⁰ By allowing them this right, Otho presumably thought that he would provide a safeguard for himself, for the soldiers ought to be well disposed toward the commanders they had chosen, who, in turn, would answer to him. Interestingly, there is no mention of a donative either demanded or offered. It has been pointed out that this means that 'the troops were by no means out of control, the emperor by no means their helpless victim'.¹⁶¹ Yet, an incident in the following month (February AD 69) reveals the fragility of the situation.¹⁶² Otho had ordered the urban cohort in Ostia to come to Rome; no reason for this move is provided in the sources, but the unit had need of weapons, whatever the intention was.¹⁶³ A tribune of the guard, Varius Crispinus, was given the task of gathering the weapons from the armoury in the *Castra Praetoria*.¹⁶⁴ He did so at night, and his actions caused great concern among the soldiers in the camp, who assumed that the purpose of the distribution of weapons was for an attack on Otho himself. Crispinus was killed in the ensuing fracas and a group of praetorians rushed to the palace to ensure that the emperor was safe; they withdrew only after Otho appeared and appeased them through tears and entreaties. The next day, two officers addressed the guard and promised a donative, though it seems also that there was a reluctance on the part of the officers to continue to serve when their troops were so volatile, and this apparently contributed to the change of heart by the soldiers.¹⁶⁵ It is clear that early in AD 69 the attitude of the praetorians was unpredictable.

It was under Otho that the guard saw active service in the field for the first time since the reign of Tiberius.¹⁶⁶ Five cohorts were sent ahead to help block the advance of the forces sent by Aulus Vitellius, the former governor of Lower Germany, who in early January had been proclaimed emperor by his troops.¹⁶⁷ In addition, Otho is said to have been accompanied in the field by the 'rest of the praetorians', as well as the *speculatores*, when he himself went north. It is not clear how many cohorts this actually involved, since removing all of the guard from the city would be impractical – there would be a need for at least some soldiers to stay behind to ensure the security of the capital.¹⁶⁸ At any rate, the praetorians in the field proved themselves capable of battle in the weeks that followed.¹⁶⁹ Even after the defeat of most of Otho's forces, he continued to be encouraged by his praetorians to keep up the fight and, after his suicide, his funeral was held by those members of the guard who had remained loyal, with some of his most devoted supporters killing themselves at the funeral pyre.¹⁷⁰

Vitellius, unsurprisingly, was distrustful of the praetorians who had fought for his predecessor (and who were mainly the same men who had served under Nero and Galba). He therefore decided to start afresh. Tacitus records that the new emperor 'first split up the guard but then provided its members with honourable discharge as a consolation'.¹⁷¹ Moreover, 16 new cohorts were created, each milliary, and with men taken mainly from the Rhine legions.¹⁷² The attraction of service in the praetorian cohorts seems to have negated the need for any donative, since there is no indication that such a grant was made. Yet there may have been some uncertainty over the loyalty of these new troops: Vitellius minted coins with the legend *CONCORDIA PRAETORIANORUM* to emphasize the harmonious relationship between emperor and guard, but the use of such a legend often implies the reverse.¹⁷³ After Vitellius had been made aware of the proclamation of Vespasian in the east, his new praetorians took part in the battles that ensued.¹⁷⁴

On the other side, the Flavians managed to locate several members of the guard who had been released by Vitellius and enlisted them with the promise of re-admittance to the ranks of the praetorians in return for their assistance; the possibility of regaining their lost status is emphasized by Tacitus.¹⁷⁵ By the middle of December, the capital itself had been attacked, with some of the fiercest fighting occurring in the area of the *Castra Praetoria* between those who were the former

praetorians of Galba and Otho, now fighting for the Flavians, and those who had taken their position, fighting for Vitellius.¹⁷⁶ The Vitellian soldiers, of course, were fighting not only for the emperor but also for their enhanced position – they were unwilling to surrender their new-found status. But, with a Flavian victory, the praetorian guard rallied around Domitian as Caesar and the Vitellian forces were routed, though his praetorians fought to the bitter end.¹⁷⁷

Flavians and Antonines

The history of the guard in the late first and into the second century is remarkably unexceptional compared to that of the early imperial period. In fact, there was very little change to the unit for over a century (c. 70–193). Vespasian is thought to have reduced the number of cohorts from the Vitellian 16 to nine, but he did not dismiss the men as his predecessor had done.¹⁷⁸ It is of note that the city cohorts received only a token sum (100 sesterces) as a donative upon the change of emperor; this is thought to be a result of the financial difficulties in which Vespasian found himself at the outset of his reign.¹⁷⁹ At some point late in the first century, the number of cohorts increased to ten, where it would stay until the demise of the praetorians under Constantine (see [Chapter 3](#)). Under Vespasian's son Domitian, the unit shared with the rest of the army in the grant of a pay rise, the first since its inception.¹⁸⁰ But, for the most part, the unit set up by Augustus was well established by the Flavian period and, as a result, there was little need for adaptation. The most important change in the late first century came in the more extensive role that the guard began to play in the field: the experience of AD 69 had shown that they could be effective on campaign and their participation in military engagements is evident from the Flavians onward.¹⁸¹

In the late first and into the second century, the main difficulty with any analysis of the guard is the nature of the literary sources. Compared to the earlier period, these sources are much less comprehensive, which makes it tricky to construct a picture of what the praetorians were doing in Rome and elsewhere.¹⁸² It is the prefecture that attracts most attention and, in particular, the status of the individuals who held the post and the honours they accrued.¹⁸³ Of particular note is that, under Vespasian, the position for the first time was held by senators: Titus, his eldest son, and Marcus Arrecinus Clemens, uncle to Titus' daughter Julia and the son of one of Gaius' prefects.¹⁸⁴ The reason for the use of these men was probably twofold:

Vespasian knew he could trust them but in addition Titus in particular was a military man unlike the previous prefects and brought to the position the discipline and skill which were needed to manage a unit disheartened by recent events.¹⁸⁵ The anomaly of senators as praetorian prefects, therefore, can be explained by expediency, and the individuals appointed after the reign of Titus continued to be equestrians.¹⁸⁶

On the other hand, the praetorians themselves do not appear in these sources that often, and when they do it is either to malign their actions or to compliment the emperor in his handling of them. A good example of the former is the situation in which Nerva found himself a year after coming to power. The praetorians had not been involved in the murder of his predecessor, Domitian.¹⁸⁷ In fact, the soldiers had requested his deification almost immediately after the deed.¹⁸⁸ Nerva was able to maintain control for nearly a year, but in the summer of AD 97, members of the guard, spurred on by their prefect, insisted on the punishment of Domitian's assassins.¹⁸⁹ Pliny makes much of the situation in which Nerva was placed by the soldiers: 'Indeed that was a great dishonour for our age, a great wound inflicted on the state. An emperor and the father of the human race – besieged, captured, confined. The opportunity to save mankind stolen from the gentlest of elderly men, that most blessed thing in the principate taken from the *princeps*, namely that he knows no compulsion.'¹⁹⁰ Why it took so long for the soldiers to make their demands known is not clear. Suetonius suggests that they were lacking leadership immediately after the assassination, which may hold a clue to the reason for the initial lack of action, but that cannot explain the considerable length of time before the confrontation.¹⁹¹ It is possible that the guard was part of a wider conspiracy and that it simply took time before the conspirators were ready.¹⁹² At any rate, when the praetorians finally did act, Nerva had little choice but to comply with their request. Not only were the individuals who had perpetrated the deed handed over for execution, but within a few months Nerva also had adopted Trajan as his heir. The key player here is the praetorian commander Casperius Aelianus. Prefect under Domitian as well, he had been dismissed prior to that emperor's assassination, but when Nerva came to power was soon returned to the prefecture, though the circumstances are not known. It is possible that his appointment was the means by which the new emperor sought to placate the guard after the murder of Domitian.¹⁹³ Less than a year later, however, Aelianus led the drive to have the assassins punished and it seems likely that he also had a hand in

Trajan being installed as heir.¹⁹⁴ That the prefect remained in post for the rest of Nerva's short reign after this episode, as seems to be the case, would be surprising if he were considered a liability either to the emperor himself or his newly appointed heir; it is more likely that Aelianus was crucial to the events that brought Trajan to the fore.¹⁹⁵

When the new emperor came to power in AD 98, he summoned Aelianus to Germany along with several of his fellow praetorians and no more is heard of them.¹⁹⁶ Although most scholars assume that Aelianus and his men were killed, the language used by Dio does not specify murder.¹⁹⁷ It is possible that the prefect was dismissed from his post (and thus from the capital) because of his role in promoting Trajan's interests prior to his accession; otherwise he would have been a constant reminder of the way in which the new emperor had come to power.¹⁹⁸

In contrast to Nerva, the relationship between Trajan and the guard is represented in the sources with the emperor in complete control. On his initial entry into Rome, Pliny describes Trajan as moving freely through the crowd, his praetorians mingling with the assembled masses: 'the soldiers were no different from the people in manner, self-control or deference'.¹⁹⁹ Furthermore, Pliny makes a special point of the fact that Trajan had paid only part of the donative promised.²⁰⁰ As has been noted, Vespasian had awarded a reduced sum due to financial restraints, but there is no suggestion that what he paid was only part of the donative. Titus and Domitian had granted the full amount, according to Dio, and it is assumed that Nerva paid a donative, but there is no evidence.²⁰¹ The suggestion has been made that because of the situation at Trajan's accession – namely that it was uncontested – he need not offer much.²⁰² Yet given the recent unrest within its ranks, it would have been risky to deny the guard the amount promised. It may be that, before he was dismissed, Aelianus had allayed any concerns on the part of the praetorians regarding the payment.

The relationship between Trajan and the guard thus appears to be one of mutual respect, though it is difficult to tell from the sources how realistic this portrayal is. In fact, it has been argued that the praetorians suffered a loss of status under Trajan and, in particular, that their duty as bodyguard for the emperor was assumed by the *equites singulares Augusti*.²⁰³ A mounted unit for the most part, these soldiers were based in Rome and accompanied the emperor on campaign.²⁰⁴ But the reason put forward for preference for the *equites*

singulares – that Trajan could not trust the praetorians and so implemented a new force to act as his bodyguard ('a blow to the praetorians') – is unfounded.²⁰⁵ There is no corroboration for this alleged loss of position and in fact there is evidence that indicates the opposite – that the guard retained its position under the new emperor – in the form of a relief from Puteoli, associated with an arch of Trajan.²⁰⁶ It is clear that these are praetorians from the scorpion decoration on the shield of one of the soldiers.²⁰⁷ That this unit appears on such a prominent monument dating to early in Trajan's reign suggests the praetorians' importance to him, especially in light of the infrequency with which they are represented in art in general. It has been noted that 'their presence is highly significant and it draws on and asserts their historical/ideal function. They are portrayed as the premier Roman/Italian soldiers ... their role confirms [the emperor's] legitimacy and excellence, while he allows and encourages them to be represented as the ideal supporters he would like them to be. Their representation in this way so early in his reign supports the modern view that Trajan's principate was indeed a golden age for the Praetorian Guard.'²⁰⁸ Given such prominence, and in the absence of other evidence, it must be acknowledged that there was no loss of status for the guard at this time.²⁰⁹ More likely, then, the praetorians and the *equites singulares* worked together, with the creation of the latter unit made necessary by the increased involvement of the guard in the field and the need for additional mounted support, something which had begun under Domitian and would continue under his successors.

The involvement of praetorians in Trajan's Dacian Wars (AD 101–2, 105–6) also indicates their importance to the emperor, for they played an active role in the campaigns.²¹⁰ A contingent of the guard, along with one of their prefects, Tiberius Claudius Livianus, accompanied Trajan and fought with him alongside legionaries and auxiliaries. Evidence comes from inscriptions and, in particular, from Trajan's Column, where praetorians are shown in various episodes.²¹¹ Though it is often difficult to distinguish between different types of soldiers on the Column, occasionally it is possible to identify the guard in situations which suggests active involvement in the campaigns.²¹² For example, praetorians along with their standards are depicted following the emperor himself as he heads to war.²¹³ They are also shown ready to take part in battle – a stark change from the first-century idea of the guard.²¹⁴ How many praetorians were involved is not clear, with only the IXth cohort confirmed.²¹⁵ The involvement of

the praetorians in battle would continue under Marcus Aurelius who, in AD 162, sent the praetorian prefect Titus Furius Victorinus with the co-emperor Lucius Verus to the east against the Parthians.²¹⁶ Marcus also had both prefects with him on campaign in the north against the Marcomanni later in his reign; units of the guard were there as well.²¹⁷ By the late second century, then, the guard had become accustomed to being in the field, not only as part of the imperial entourage but also as active participants in battles.

Given the lack of reliable and comprehensive literary sources for the second half of the second century AD, it is difficult to say much about the praetorians in this period.²¹⁸ For example, the *Historia Augusta* records that Marcus Aurelius, on his accession with Lucius Verus in AD 161, offered a sizeable donative to the praetorians; given that the general trend by this time was to reward the guard at a change of emperor, the account may reflect the truth, though the amount (20,000 sesterces) is undoubtedly an exaggeration.²¹⁹ In addition, Marcus addressed the guard in the camp early in January AD 168 at which time he announced additional privileges for veterans.²²⁰ The use of praetorians as *stationarii* ('outposted soldiers') is evident in this period from inscriptions; these soldiers were sent to the provinces as well as to other sites in Italy to assist with policing.²²¹ It has been suggested that the sending of men from the city cohorts (since those belonging to the urban cohorts are attested as well) must have been a decision made at the highest level.²²² But beyond these few details, there is little that can be said with certainty. It is only with Commodus that a fuller picture starts to emerge, though the focus again is on the commanders rather than the cohorts. In his 12-year reign, Commodus went through several prefects, though Sextus Tigidius Perennis, in post from AD 182 to 185, attracts much of the attention since he is said to have done Commodus' job for him.²²³ Yet it has been argued that arrogation of imperial duties, given the centralization of authority, is not likely even with an emperor so inclined to indulge himself, and there is evidence to show that Commodus did take an active role in the running of the empire.²²⁴ On the other hand, his experience with Perennis, who seems to have lost the confidence of the emperor though in circumstances that are unclear, may have made Commodus suspicious of his praetorian prefects – and, by extension, the guard itself.²²⁵ And this distrust may account for the appointment, late in the reign, of the emperor's chamberlain, Marcus Aurelius Cleander, with the official title *a pugione* ('Master of the Dagger'). It is not clear what this position

entailed, though some scholars prefer to see Cleander as overseeing both the guard and the prefects.²²⁶ If that is the case, then the relationship between Commodus and the praetorians must have been extremely uneasy in the years before his death. A demonstration against Cleander in the Circus Maximus eventually brought about his downfall, though the event is notable as well for an apparent rift among the urban soldiers, some of whom – named specifically as praetorians – seemed to be in support of the crowd, perhaps a result of the strained relationship between the guard and the *a pugione*.²²⁷

Severans and the third century

At the end of AD 192, Commodus was murdered in a conspiracy that involved the praetorian prefect Quintus Aemilius Laetus but not the praetorians.²²⁸ Following the emperor's death, the guard was caught up in the turbulent events that produced three rulers in six months. Throughout the accounts of both Dio and Herodian for this period, the praetorians are caricatured as unruly and inept: for example, Herodian mentions their desire for plunder and debauchery, Dio their delicacy caused by soft living in the capital.²²⁹ Such depictions are not helpful when trying to determine the role that the guard played in the events of the first half of AD 193, and the attitude of the two authors must be borne in mind in the discussion that follows.

Praetorians were involved in both confirming Commodus' successor, Publius Helvius Pertinax, and in his murder.²³⁰ The new emperor is said to have enforced strict discipline on the city cohorts when he took power – the sources record the displeasure of the guard in particular.²³¹ After ruling for only 87 days, Pertinax was confronted by a small group of soldiers in the palace; he attempted to reason with them without success and was killed.²³² The role of their prefect, Laetus, is crucial here, since it is clear that he was instrumental in provoking the guard to act against the emperor, though his reasons are not known.²³³ Immediately after Pertinax's death, what is usually described as the 'auctioning' of the empire took place, with two men vying for the principate and Didius Julianus becoming the next emperor. This incident occurs in both of the main sources for the period, Dio and Herodian, but only the former makes a spectacle of it and there are many problems with his account.²³⁴ He notes that the urban prefect, Flavius Sulpicianus, had been sent by Pertinax to the *Castra Praetoria* to quell a disturbance; Sulpicianus must have been there to deal with the urban cohorts rather than the praetorians, whose prefect does not appear in the story. It is not known what

precipitated the commotion in the camp. Dio then records that when news of the emperor's death reached the *Castra Praetoria*, Sulpicianus tried to gain the principate for himself, with Julianus arriving shortly thereafter. The *Historia Augusta*, usually much less reliable, may add a significant detail to the story: Julianus had gone to the senate, having heard that it had been convened, but when he arrived, the doors were closed. He was then urged by two tribunes of the guard to go to the *Castra Praetoria*; when he hesitated, he was taken there by them, only to find Sulpicianus already discussing his position with the soldiers inside the camp.²³⁵ What seems to be happening here, then, is confusion after the unexpected murder of an emperor. The guard would have been the first to recognize that an interregnum would not be in anyone's interest, in particular its own.²³⁶ Two groups of soldiers – some inside the camp, others outside – seized upon two men of senatorial status who were each offered the principate. In all the sources, the deciding factor for the praetorians in choosing between the two men was not the amount of money offered, as might be expected from Dio's use of the words 'market' and 'auction house', but rather the relationship between Sulpicianus and Pertinax, for the urban prefect was the murdered emperor's father-in-law.²³⁷ It was thus fear of retribution that caused the soldiers to support Julianus instead.²³⁸

It became clear very quickly that Julianus had a rival for the principate in the figure of the governor of Upper Pannonia. Lucius Septimius Severus had been declared emperor on 9 April by his troops and lost no time in making his way to Rome, arriving in early June to find that Julianus had been declared a public enemy by the senate and murdered. One of the first acts undertaken by Severus was to cashier the entire praetorian guard. The reason given was the assassination of Pertinax; it is of note that there is no mention of the alleged buying and selling of the empire.²³⁹ Although those directly responsible for the murder were put to death, that the entire guard was cashiered as well is remarkable: it is clear that Severus did not want to employ the former praetorians and used this as an opportunity to be rid of them. The dismissal happened so quickly after his arrival at the capital that there must have been much advance planning involved; in fact, Herodian indicates that officers of the guard had been approached in secret to betray their men in return for rewards.²⁴⁰ On the other hand, the soldiers probably expected that they themselves would be rewarded, as had happened so often in the past with a change of emperor, and thus were able to be deceived quite easily.²⁴¹ The real

reason behind the cashiering, however, must have been that getting rid of those currently serving in the guard gave Severus the chance to reward his own troops who had supported him in his bid for power, much as had happened in the civil war of AD 69. But unlike the earlier occasion, this time Severus took the decision to dismiss all of the men without compensation, probably because of the somewhat uncertain financial situation.²⁴² And so, for the first time, the praetorian guard began to be treated as just another part of the army, with Severus' legionary soldiers promoted to what in the past had been an elite unit, open only to Roman citizens from a prescribed area.²⁴³ This practice of recruitment from the legions – a completely different approach to what had happened previously – would be followed until the guard was disbanded in AD 312.

The question arises, therefore, as to whether this unit, which continued to use the name 'praetorian guard', is the same as that instituted by Augustus 200 years earlier. The answer has to be no. Once service in the praetorian guard became part of the regular system of promotion for legionaries, and men from all over the empire could join, the unit no longer was distinguished in the same way.²⁴⁴ While these soldiers may have continued to serve as a bodyguard, they were much more closely aligned with the army overall. In fact, this new guard was similar to the type of unit that had been seen in the late republic – a group specifically providing military protection for a general in the field – especially since in the century between the change wrought by Severus and the disbanding by Constantine, the guard was away on campaign more often than in Rome. The duties that they had had, then, in the first century AD and the ways in which emperors in the early principate had made use of such a sizeable force in the administration of the capital may have changed dramatically after this time.²⁴⁵

Severus was criticized for this far-reaching transformation by Dio, who offers his own explanation for the change – the emperor wanted the praetorians to have experience as legionaries before serving in the guard; in addition, it provided him with a way of rewarding his soldiers: 'Some especially accused him because he set aside the tradition that the praetorians be chosen only from Italy, Spain, Macedonia and Noricum, which had provided men more reasonable in appearance and more simple in character. Instead he ordered that any requirement be filled from all the legions in like manner, doing so in order that he might have guards with military knowledge and also

have a way of rewarding those brave in war.’²⁴⁶ For Dio, an eyewitness to much in this period, the result was negative: the youth of Italy was ruined and they turned to robbery and gladiatorial fighting.²⁴⁷ A good example is provided by the author in Bulla Felix, who gathered a band of around 600 men and engaged in brigandage throughout southern Italy.²⁴⁸ Although Dio may be guilty of exaggerating the lack of opportunity for Italians once the system of recruitment had changed, such a radical transformation did undermine the idea of the praetorians as an ‘elite’ unit.

There are several incidents in the early third century that highlight the problem of ordinary soldiers as praetorians in Rome. Men from the unit were involved in clashes with the civilian population early in the reign of Alexander Severus; it is not clear what started the riots – Dio simply says that it was ‘some trivial cause’ – but the unrest went on for three days and caused great damage to the city.²⁴⁹ While it is true that an uneasy relationship had existed between the guard and the populace from the very beginning of its history, this animosity undoubtedly had been exacerbated by the Severan changes.²⁵⁰ Not long after this incident, praetorians were implicated in the murder of the jurist and praetorian prefect Domitius Ulpianus; the cause undoubtedly stemmed from the commander’s lack of experience in dealing with such a group of soldiers.²⁵¹ And, by AD 229, when Dio himself became consul with the emperor Alexander Severus, the situation with the soldiers in the city was so unsettled that he could not take up his post in Rome, ostensibly for fear of his life.²⁵² It is clear that the use of soldiers of provincial origin in the capital was problematic.

In addition, the unit was involved in the many changes of emperor and ensuing conflicts in the third century. Indeed, from the death of Severus, the praetorians played a significant role in the accession of the remaining emperors of the Severan period. The murder by Caracalla of his brother (and co-emperor) Geta in AD 211 was facilitated by the relationship the former had forged with the soldiers; he continually referred to himself as one of their comrades and made no attempt to hide his preference for a military lifestyle.²⁵³ Caracalla’s successor was the praetorian prefect, Marcus Opellius Macrinus, who made use of the guard in a plot against the emperor.²⁵⁴ The reign proved to be brief, however, since the soldiers were not happy with the change, having been so favoured by Caracalla, and Macrinus’ moderation of their terms of service, in particular their pay, was

greeted with dismay.²⁵⁵

Furthermore, there were two other candidates for the purple whose connections appealed to the guard: the cousins Elagabalus and Alexander Severus, both also cousins of Caracalla. The praetorians seem to have played only a small part in the overthrow of Macrinus and the accession of Elagabalus in May AD 218.²⁵⁶ But they were instrumental in his removal four years later, motivated almost certainly by alarm at his behaviour, in particular, his relationship with the god Elagabal.²⁵⁷ Dio records that Elagabalus noted their displeasure with him: 'The false Antoninus, once having been praised by the senate, said "Indeed, you love me and, by Jupiter, the people as well and the legions abroad. But to the praetorians, to whom I give so much, I am not pleasing."'²⁵⁸ To ameliorate the situation, Elagabalus adopted his cousin; the sources describe the rivalry that ensued as each contended for the support of the soldiers.²⁵⁹ In fact, the emperor made a number of attempts to murder Alexander in the last months of his reign, but to no avail since his cousin was protected by the guard.²⁶⁰ Before long, Elagabalus found himself deserted by the praetorians and he was murdered, along with his mother Julia Soaemias, in the *Castra Praetoria* on 13 March 222.²⁶¹ That the soldiers favoured a 13-year-old boy as emperor says much about the attitude towards Elagabalus and his religious reforms, for the empire as a whole had been managed quite well.²⁶² The reign of his cousin fared better, though as has been noted, the guard proved unruly during Alexander's tenure and it is significant, therefore, that he managed to hold on to power for 13 years, given the circumstances.²⁶³

In AD 238, when the principate was contested by three factions – that of Maximinus Thrax (supported by the army), that of Balbinus and Pupienus (supported by the senate), and that of Gordian III (grandson of the recently murdered emperor, Gordian I) – there were riots once again in Rome between the populace and those members of the guard still in the capital, which resulted in the *Castra Praetoria* being besieged.²⁶⁴ The plebs enlisted the help of gladiators against the praetorians, who were trapped in the camp for several days, until their hand was forced by the cutting off of their water supply. Herodian describes how the soldiers then attacked the people in the city, eventually setting fire to houses, which caused great destruction. Shortly thereafter, allegedly annoyed at not having had a say in the choice of emperor and, more importantly, angered at the presence of German soldiers in the capital, praetorians attacked the palace. Both

Pupienus and Balbinus were killed, and Gordian III was declared emperor by the guard.²⁶⁵ According to Herodian, the praetorians were fearful that the emperors would replace them as had happened under Severus. It must be noted, however, that these men – former legionaries – now had much more to lose than the men of AD 193, since their conditions had improved considerably once they had become praetorians. But it is clear as well that the oath of allegiance meant little by this period.

For much of the remainder of the century, the sources are too unreliable to make many observations about the praetorians.²⁶⁶ There is evidence of action taken against bandits, with the guard being relied upon to perform the lead role, much in the manner of the Bulla incident discussed earlier.²⁶⁷ But, since the emperors were campaigning in the provinces for the most part in this period, so too was the majority of the guard.²⁶⁸ Yet, ‘from the mid-third century onwards it is difficult to specify what categories of soldiers escorted and guarded the emperor in person, all the more so because continual wars and civil unrest meant that the emperors spent a large part of their time in a wider military context.’²⁶⁹ The changes to the forces in this period undoubtedly had an impact on the guard, which itself more and more resembled the type of unit found in the late republic.²⁷⁰ This is especially the case after the introduction of the system of the Tetrarchs in March 293: each of the four rulers must have had his own contingent of praetorians, much as had been the case with the triumvirs in the late republic. There is evidence, for example, of them being with Diocletian while he was in Nicomedia.²⁷¹ But by the start of the fourth century, the guard had become more of a menace than a benefit.²⁷² Diocletian had reduced the effective late in the third century, though it is not clear by how much; this action may signal the beginning of the end, since it is possible that he wanted to do away with them completely.²⁷³ Likewise, Galerius is said to have considered their abolition as well in 306; in this case, the motivation seems to be connected with taxation.²⁷⁴

The final chapter in the history of the guard, however, is connected with the struggle for supreme power in the early fourth century. A usurper, Maxentius, the son of the former emperor Maximian, was proclaimed by the praetorians in October 306, a rival to Galerius and his colleagues.²⁷⁵ The senate and people of Rome also supported him; there may have been a need for the latter because of the reduced number of soldiers in the guard.²⁷⁶ But Maxentius did not keep the

populace on side for long, if the report in Eusebius is correct that, at some point, he sent his guard against the mob.²⁷⁷ Though it would be six years before he was defeated by Constantine, when Maxentius lost the battle of the Milvian Bridge (28 October 312), it meant the end of the praetorian guard. They were disbanded later that same year and their camp destroyed.²⁷⁸

ORGANIZATION

As has been seen, the institution established by Augustus changed little in the first two centuries of its existence. It is to that emperor's credit that he made use of the template provided by the late republican bodyguards discussed in the previous chapter, combining the best of the military and administrative aspects of these groups. The way that the praetorians were organized in the imperial period, in particular, did not alter substantially until the comprehensive changes brought about by Septimius Severus in AD 193. This chapter will explore the fundamentals of that organization: the number of cohorts, the strength of each, their pay and recruitment. Moreover, the physical setting of the *Castra Praetoria* in Rome will be explored, along with the uniform of the guard. It is important to remember that most of this organization was implemented at the very outset of the principate and illustrates well the pragmatic approach of the first emperor.

Number of praetorians

It is difficult to ascertain the number of praetorian cohorts and the effective (the numerical strength of each cohort) under Augustus because the sources that include such figures contradict each other. Dio, in his description of the forces that the emperor allegedly had at his disposal in AD 5, records that, 'There were bodyguards, being ten thousand in number, arranged in ten units.'¹ But, in a passage already cited, Tacitus records only nine cohorts before Vitellius, without reference to the effective: 'his own army occupied the city – three urban and nine praetorian cohorts'.² Most scholars have assumed that Dio was describing the situation in his own time and therefore have taken Tacitus' account as the correct one.³ It has been argued that the original number of praetorian cohorts was fixed at nine by Augustus to avoid any direct correlation with the cohorts of a legion but, in fact, it is impossible to know exactly how many cohorts he set up, and the number may even have fluctuated in the early days of the guard's existence.⁴ By the end of his reign or early in Tiberius' reign, however, the number had been stabilized at nine.

Epigraphic evidence suggests that praetorian cohorts numbered X, XI and XII existed prior to the reign of Vespasian.⁵ It had been

assumed by scholars that any increase would have been recorded by Tacitus; the creation of the new cohorts was thus attributed to the section of the *Annals* that was missing, namely, to the reign of Gaius or early in the reign of Claudius.⁶ But an inscription discovered in 1976 provides confirmation that it was under Tiberius that at least two additional cohorts were created. Dedicated to Aulus Virgius Marsus, the stone provides details of an illustrious military career: Marsus achieved the *primipilate* (position of chief centurion) of the legio III Gallica twice, and also served as tribune of the guard under both Augustus and Tiberius.⁷ Of interest here, though, is that the terms of service in the capital were with the IIIth and XIth cohorts. Though the order is reversed in the inscription, it is likely that the first, with the IIIth cohort, was under Augustus; this leaves Marsus tribune of the XIth praetorian cohort at some point in Tiberius' reign. Since it seems to have been extremely rare at this period to hold more than one tribunate in the guard, there must have been extenuating circumstances for Marsus' return, and that may well have been the need for experienced officers in the newly formed cohorts early in the reign of Tiberius. The reversal of the praetorian tribunates from their chronological order, therefore, is either the result of imprecision in the setting up of the inscription, a practice that is known from other examples, or it is a deliberate inversion, to highlight the unusual nature of the repeated tribunate.⁸ As a result of this inscription, it now seems certain that there were at least 11 cohorts of praetorians under Tiberius.⁹ There is also good reason to place the increase in the number of cohorts in the early 20s AD, for that was the date of the construction of a permanent base for the guard, the *Castra Praetoria*, discussed below. It is likely, then, that if one accepts Tacitus' testimony of nine cohorts in AD 23, he is referring specifically to the period prior to the establishment of the camp. The organization of his text, with discussion of the number of cohorts being placed in close proximity to that of the construction of the camp, may add force to this observation.

Throughout the praetorians' history, there were few additional changes to the number of cohorts. At some point before the reign of Vespasian, another cohort had been added, bringing the total to 12.¹⁰ Furthermore, in his brief tenure during the civil war of AD 69, Vitellius created 16 cohorts; according to Tacitus, 'the usual military organisation was thrown into disarray by corruption or by ambition: sixteen praetorian and four urban cohorts were being enrolled, each to have one thousand men.'¹¹ The reason for the change was mistrust by

the new emperor of the unit most closely associated with his predecessor, though Suetonius also suggests that the praetorians had set a dangerous example by abandoning Galba when emperor.¹² Tacitus also records that Vitellius showed great indulgence to his own soldiers, allowing them to enrol in the city cohorts if they chose; this was to the detriment of both the legions and the city cohorts, he continues, with the former losing their strongest recruits, the latter their distinction, since 20,000 men were selected at random for these esteemed units rather than being vetted.¹³ When Vespasian came to power, however, it is thought that he reduced the praetorian cohorts back to nine.¹⁴ The change is not mentioned in the sources, and it is difficult to know why he would have done this, especially since he had to accommodate three different groups in any reorganization: the old Othonian guard, the former Vitellian men and his own soldiers.¹⁵ The reduction from 16 cohorts may have been for financial reasons, though there is also the possibility that he wished to imitate Augustus by having the same number, in an attempt to associate himself with the first emperor.¹⁶ The number remained at nine only briefly, for by the end of the first century, a tenth cohort had been added.¹⁷ The increase probably occurred under Domitian, since it was in his reign that the guard began to be used more in the field; an additional cohort, then, would be useful.¹⁸ The number of cohorts would remain stable for the rest of the unit's history.

The effective is also a matter of fierce debate: were they quingenary (500 strong) or milliary (1,000 men)? Dio records the latter in the passage cited above in which he provides the number of cohorts under Augustus, but this figure has been criticized by many scholars who argue instead for a quingenary cohort, believing that Dio had attributed to the Augustan period the effective of the late second century AD.¹⁹ The problem rests with the lack of information in the literary sources: specific references to the number of praetorians are rare, not surprising given the nature of the unit and of the sources. It must be noted, however, that there is no specific evidence in the extant sources for the number 500.²⁰ It has also been observed that, in the context of the conflicts of AD 69, 'with a praetorian guard of only 6,000 men (paper strength) it is almost impossible to make sense of the operations in the Otho-Vitellius war'.²¹ Moreover, that Dio would not have recorded such a significant modification as the doubling of the effective under Severus is unlikely; he was well acquainted with the changes in the guard which took place early in that reign, in particular the disbanding of the praetorians after Severus' accession

and their replacement by soldiers from the legions.²²

Dio's contemporary Herodian sometimes is cited in support of an increase in the number of men per cohort in the Severan period, for he records that the emperor 'quadrupled' the troops in Rome: 'the forces in Rome had been increased fourfold, and so great an army was encamped before the city that no external force remained that was trustworthy, nor a rival in size of unit, in physique or in abundance of resources.'²³ His statement has been interpreted as an 'exaggeration', and it is true that the figures simply do not add up.²⁴ But, more importantly, it does not mean that the number of men in the individual praetorian cohorts changed at that time. Severus was responsible for the creation of three new legions early in his reign, one of which, II Parthica, was housed at Albanum, about 20 kilometres south of Rome, after AD 197.²⁵ The perception, then, that the troops had 'quadrupled' is Herodian's way of indicating the placement of a considerable number of soldiers in the vicinity of the capital, and he is emphasizing the manner in which Rome became militarized under Severus.²⁶

In Tacitus, the only reference to the effective occurs in the context of the changes to the guard under Vitellius, cited earlier: the number is given as 1,000 per cohort.²⁷ It has been suggested that this indicates that the effective was doubled at the same time as the number of cohorts was increased.²⁸ But Tacitus undoubtedly would have been more specific about recording such a change, had it occurred; in fact, his reticence may add to the argument that the cohorts had always been milliary.²⁹ In the final analysis, there simply is no evidence in any of the extant sources for an increase in the strength of the individual cohorts between Augustus and Severus. From the scarce evidence at hand, therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the cohorts were milliary from the outset.³⁰ An effective of 1,000 men per cohort would also provide greater efficiency, since the praetorians were used for such a wide variety of tasks in the city, beyond the basic duty of guarding the emperor and his family.³¹

Service

Recruitment to the guard was restricted to men of free birth who were Roman citizens. As noted earlier, the first imperial praetorians likely were veterans from the praetorian cohorts of both Octavian and Antony (see [Chapter 2](#)). During Augustus' reign, however, it became the practice to recruit soldiers for the guard directly from citizens on an individual basis.³² Italians dominate in the ranks from the

beginning; it has been argued that this preference allowed them a means of advancement.³³ Indeed, the number of Italians remains consistently high until the major overhaul of the guard by Severus.³⁴ Tacitus records that in the early principate recruits were predominantly from Latium, Etruria, Umbria and the oldest colonies, that is the most 'Roman' parts of Italy.³⁵ Yet there undoubtedly were many cases of men who managed to defy the rule.³⁶ For example, Dio records that Gauls and Germans were serving in the bodyguard in the reign of Augustus; they were sent away from Rome by the emperor after the Varan disaster in AD 9.³⁷ Moreover, there seems to be recruits from Gallia Narbonensis, Spain and Macedonia in the cohorts in the first century, though the inscriptions which refer to these non-Italian praetorians are not securely dated.³⁸ It is only in the civil war years that movement from the legions to the guard was sanctioned, with Vitellius in particular using promotion to the praetorians as a way of rewarding those soldiers who had supported his bid for power. Even so, the number of such transfers for which there is epigraphic evidence is negligible.³⁹ Conversely, the changes brought in by Severus in the late second century changed recruitment dramatically, with Italian recruits at minimal numbers in the third century, once the unit was opened up to transfers from all soldiers in the legions.⁴⁰

Service in the guard must have seemed an attractive option, since the term of duty for praetorians was shorter than that of the ordinary soldier – 16 as opposed to 25 years.⁴¹ Indeed, it is possible that 16 years was only 'an ideal minimum length of service', and that 18 years was the norm.⁴² The age at which these men joined averaged between 18 and 20.⁴³ The shorter length of service, in addition to the higher rate of pay and the increased prospects for promotion due to their proximity to the emperor, probably attracted better recruits to the praetorians, and seems to have continued to attract Italians to the unit when they were less inclined to join the legions.⁴⁴ But the social status of these recruits is unknown. It has been argued both that they were of modest means and that they came from a more affluent background.⁴⁵ One might consider the demographic evidence here in an attempt to add to the debate: a considerable difference in the level of accuracy on gravestones between social classes has been noted, with so-called age rounding (that is, ages ending in multiples of five) occurring more often among those of lower status. In a recent study of inscriptions for guardsmen from the vicinity of Rome, it was shown that the rate of those who engaged in this process is far less than for the legionaries.⁴⁶ It may be possible, therefore, that praetorians who

were recruited directly to the unit (i.e. before the Severan change) were from a higher-status background.

Those who served in the guard had the same restrictions as soldiers in the rest of the army, in particular the inability to marry officially while in service, an injunction that lasted until the reign of Severus.⁴⁷ It has been noted that, in fact, praetorians do not enter into informal marriage arrangements all that frequently until after the Severan change, though the number increases for other soldiers (both legionaries and auxiliaries) throughout the second century AD.⁴⁸ The question of whether the attractions of Rome added to the appeal of serving in the guard is not often considered, yet life in the city was not always that comfortable. Rome was a notoriously deadly city when it came to hygiene and sanitation, and it has been estimated that the praetorians (and other city units) suffered greatly because of this.⁴⁹

After serving their time in the guard, most praetorian soldiers retired, though some were invited to become *evocati Augusti* ('senior soldiers') and stay on for further service. The term itself clearly illustrates the close relationship between the men of the guard and the emperor, for the use of *Augusti* was reserved for former praetorians.⁵⁰ An example of such an *evocatus* is provided by Gaius Vedennius Moderatus, one of those who benefited from the civil war in AD 69.⁵¹ A member of the XVI Gallica legion that had supported Vitellius, Vedennius was transferred by Vespasian to the guard; he then spent eight years in the ninth praetorian cohort, at which point he was honourably discharged. At some time thereafter he was recalled, becoming an *evocatus Augusti* for 23 years, perhaps because of his specialist skills, since the inscription specifically mentions the imperial armoury.⁵² Not all *evocati* were so distinguished but, for many, being recalled must have been an honour not to be refused; in fact, some of these senior soldiers went on to serve as officers in the unit (see below). For those praetorians who were discharged, the ceremony occurred on 1 January, though only every other year.⁵³ Evidence of those who left the unit comes primarily from gravestones.⁵⁴ Most importantly, these reveal the careers of the soldiers, as with Vedennius.⁵⁵ But, in addition, the stones provide information about where these men settled after retirement. Many decided to stay in Rome, despite being from elsewhere. It has been suggested that they lacked the courage to leave after having served there for so many years, but it is equally likely that they simply had grown to like life in the capital.⁵⁶ Some also retired to other parts of Italy and still others –

interestingly, often Italians – decamped to the provinces. It is possible that some of these men were granted land upon retirement (*missio agraria*) and that their choice of location, therefore, was limited.⁵⁷ Such grants had been made to the praetorians from their earliest history.⁵⁸ But, in fact, most praetorians simply returned to their place of origin; this was especially the case after the Severan reorganization.⁵⁹ Some of these former praetorians took an active role in their communities when they retired, often in administrative roles, which indicates that they were valued for their abilities.⁶⁰

The opportunity for praetorians to move away from the capital may explain the need for these soldiers, on being released, to be given military diplomas – documents that indicated they were Roman citizens with *conubium* (the right to marry).⁶¹ Since membership of the guard was restricted to those who already held Roman citizenship, there was not the same need to provide diplomas establishing this feature for praetorians as was the case for those auxiliaries granted the right of citizenship upon discharge. For the praetorians, the importance was the second component, the grant of *conubium*, especially if they were settling outside of Rome.⁶²

The earliest extant diploma for a member of the guard dates to the mid-70s AD, but its fragmentary nature does not provide much information.⁶³ A complete diploma from AD 76 is the first example that provides the full wording, and, as has been noted already, the close association between the emperor and the guard is highlighted by the text: ‘I have appended the names of the *speculatores*, those who have served in my imperial guard, and likewise, of the soldiers who were in the nine praetorian cohorts and four urban cohorts.’⁶⁴ Numbers of praetorian diplomas are rare until early in the third century AD, with only 14 listed before that date in a recent catalogue of these documents.⁶⁵ It is not clear when the first diplomas were issued for the guard; the civil war of AD 69 might have been the stimulus.⁶⁶ The numbers in the third century increase substantially, undoubtedly because of the need for those who had been in the guard to have the right to marry if they returned to their homeland, which now could be anywhere in the empire.⁶⁷

Commanders

While the overall command of the guard fell to the praetorian prefects (under the direction of the emperor), the day-to-day management of the cohorts was done by tribunes (one per cohort) and centurions (six per cohort).⁶⁸ Praetorian tribunes had to be of the equestrian class,

though soon they also were former centurions.⁶⁹ How these appointments were made is not certain. Centurions in the provincial army were chosen by their commanders, but legionary tribunes generally seem to have been appointed by the emperor, though many men were probably brought to the emperor's attention as a personal favour.⁷⁰ Tacitus suggests that, as their commander, Sejanus chose centurions and tribunes for the guard himself, but since the author is eager to criticize the prefect, it is not clear that this was the usual procedure.⁷¹ It has been noted already that the same author insinuates that Agrippina replaced some of the tribunes and centurions in an attempt to garner support for Nero as Claudius' heir: she invented reasons for the dismissal of some soldiers and had others promoted.⁷² Yet, as with Sejanus, this may be highlighted in the text because of its anomaly. What is clear is that praetorian tribunes often had served as *primuspilus* ('chief centurion') and then moved directly from that post to the city cohorts without having served as a tribune in the provincial army first.⁷³ Eventually, the standard career path was to move through the city tribunes, from that of the *vigiles* to the urban and finally to the guard.⁷⁴ It is thought that praetorian tribunes had tasks similar to their counterparts in the legionary army, though the proximity to Rome would have brought additional pressures.⁷⁵ For example, one of the responsibilities of the tribunes was to confine soldiers in the camp and to keep the keys of the gates.⁷⁶ This would be even more important with the guard being based in the capital and the tense relationship between civilian and soldier. Tribunes were assisted by soldiers with a wide range of responsibilities, including the *cornicularius* ('senior clerk'), the *beneficiarius* ('clerk'), the *singularis* ('aide'), the *librarius* ('accountant') and the *exactus* ('record keeper'). The scope of these additional posts indicates the complexity of the tribune's position.⁷⁷

With regard to centurions, it is thought that many would have been former praetorian soldiers, most of them *evocati Augusti*, though men who had been directly commissioned as centurions in the legions sometimes served in the praetorian cohorts as well.⁷⁸ After serving in senior positions as rankers, they were advanced to the post of centurion.⁷⁹ Two of their number were thought to be of higher rank: the *trecenarius* ('senior centurion') and the *princeps castrorum* ('camp administrator').⁸⁰ Unlike their legionary counterparts, no hierarchy can be discerned among the praetorian centurions other than for these two positions; promotion through the centuries did not occur in the same way as in the legions, but the *trecenarius* generally had to have

served as a centurion in either the urban or praetorian cohorts first.⁸¹ There were three posts for each century, however, that were coveted: the *tesserarius* ('officer of the watchword'), the *optio* ('orderly') and the *signifer* ('standard bearer'); these were prerequisites for advancement.⁸² After serving as *trecenarius*, the soldier often moved to an advanced centurionate in the legions and then became *primuspilus*.⁸³ There was a clear career advantage to have served in the guard.⁸⁴

Tribunes and centurions of the guard appear in the literary sources more often than the rankers but still not all that frequently. In most cases, they have come to the attention of the authors because of notorious behaviour, in particular, their involvement in conspiracies. Cassius Chaerea, the soldier who led the conspiracy against Gaius, was a tribune, as were three of his co-conspirators.⁸⁵ The Pisonian Conspiracy against Nero in AD 65 involved several tribunes, apparently united by their personal dislike of the emperor.⁸⁶ As Nero's behaviour became more eccentric, the soldiers grew less tolerant of his conduct, and some of them were drawn to conspire against him in spite of their oaths of loyalty. Once again, it was primarily the officers of the guard, in concert with senators and *equites*, who were at the forefront. The focus of the conspiracy was the replacement of Nero by the senator Gaius Calpurnius Piso. The choice of someone who was not a member of the Julio-Claudian family may indicate that the impetus came not from those guard members who were involved but from elsewhere among the conspirators. In fact, it is recorded that the praetorians were not happy with the selection of Piso: Tacitus reports a rumour that the officers would replace him with Nero's advisor, the philosopher Seneca, soon after the transfer of power had occurred.⁸⁷ The extent of the involvement of the rank and file is not recorded in the sources but, as had been the case with the conspiracy against Gaius, there was a need for the participation of at least a few of the soldiers if the plan was to succeed. It is likely that the average recruit had no animosity towards the emperor, though some may have been influenced by the prejudices of their commanders.

It was the inclusion of the praetorian prefect Lucius Faenius Rufus, however, that separates this conspiracy from that against Gaius; his involvement marked the first time that a prefect is known to have taken an active role in a plot against the emperor.⁸⁸ His colleague Tigellinus did not take part.⁸⁹ The two prefects did not get along, however, and Tacitus records that, from the start, Tigellinus set about

undermining Rufus' position.⁹⁰ The prominence of the former as a close companion of the emperor and his domination of the office of prefect no doubt contributed to the alienation of Rufus, and this disaffection must have been noticed by the officers of the guard, if not by the rank and file. It almost certainly helped to draw Rufus into the conspiracy. His commitment was thought to augur success, though his actions in the affair were to prove disastrous. His participation presumably indicated to those involved that he brought with him the backing of the entire guard, though in reality, it could not guarantee anything.⁹¹

In the end, delays in putting the plan into action resulted in the betrayal of the conspiracy. The chronology of the events is not entirely clear, but in the initial stages, everyone seemed unwilling or unable to act, even after having gained assurances from Rufus that they had his support. The first disclosure of the plot came from the squadron commander at Misenum, Volusius Proculus, who had been approached to carry out the plan because of the delays. His report to Nero forced the hand of the conspirators, who were then betrayed by one of their freedmen.⁹² Nero was frightened enough to increase his guard and to post soldiers at every route into the city, both by land and by water.⁹³ He clearly did not yet know how widespread the conspiracy was among his officers, and he used them to convey messages to those accused of complicity, apparently unaware of the guilt of the men he sent. The emperor sent new recruits, however, to issue the order of death to Piso, being unwilling to rely upon any of those who might be favouring the consul.⁹⁴ The ability of those officers eventually implicated to escape detection for so long resulted from a willingness to carry out Nero's order to investigate their fellow conspirators (and others accused with them) and thus deflect attention away from themselves. It is not clear whether this interrogation included torture of their colleagues, which would cast a quite malevolent light on those officers involved. Rufus himself is depicted as taking part in investigations carried out by Nero and Tigellinus and, in one instance, the tribune Subrius Flavus wanted to murder the emperor during the procedure but was stopped by the prefect, who obviously still had firm control over his men.⁹⁵

It was their enthusiastic interrogation that ultimately brought about the downfall of many of the officers, for they were betrayed by those being questioned. Nero must have been astounded to discover how widespread the conspiracy was among the upper ranks of the

praetorians. It seems that as many as seven (of the 12) tribunes were involved; of these, four were demoted, two committed suicide, one was murdered.⁹⁶ Of the other five, only two seem not to have been incriminated.⁹⁷ Indeed, it is remarkable that the conspiracy failed, given the involvement of so many high-ranking members of the guard.⁹⁸ The entire plan seems to have collapsed because of the unwillingness of those involved, in particular the tribunes and the prefect, to take decisive action.⁹⁹ For the majority of the praetorians, however, the Pisonian Conspiracy proved to be a windfall. They stood to gain no matter what the outcome. If the plot had succeeded, there can be no doubt that the soldiers would have been enticed by a large donative to pledge allegiance to the new emperor. On the other hand, when it failed, Nero saw to it that they were well rewarded for not having deserted him. After the punishment of the conspirators had been carried out, he gave the praetorians a donative of 2,000 sesterces, and granted them free grain.¹⁰⁰ These gifts signalled the emperor's recognition that, even though the plot primarily had involved officers, he still needed to acknowledge the loyalty of the majority of the guard in the affair and ensure their continued support; this was especially the case, given that the replacement of so many of their commanders was a disruptive element in itself. It is of note that only members of the guard were given the donative and there is no mention in the sources of any grant to the rest of the army, nor for the people as a whole. In addition to these grants to the soldiers, Nero also rewarded individuals for their loyalty, among them Tigellinus. The rewards that he received were substantial for a praetorian prefect: an honorary triumph, and statues in the palace and the forum.¹⁰¹ Such excessive honours must indicate a significant role in the detection of the plot, something which the sources have omitted to record.

Tribunes and centurions occasionally are depicted in the sources as taking part in more benign activities, though not always in ways that are flattering. Tiberius is recorded to have punished a centurion on Capri who had neglected to clear the path along which the emperor's litter was travelling.¹⁰² It was during the reign of Claudius that praetorians, under the command of the prefect and tribunes, took part in beast hunts for the first time.¹⁰³ In AD 59, a cohort of the guard along with centurions, tribunes and their prefect were present at Nero's stage debut at the 'youth games' in Rome; at the Neronia in AD 65, praetorians formed part of a procession carrying his lyre (see [Chapter 4](#)). From a later period, Dio records that Gaius Sulpicius Similis, one of the tribunes who served under Trajan, was a modest

fellow who reluctantly agreed to be promoted to prefect, only to resign it immediately. Dio also includes the story that Plautianus, Septimius Severus' prefect, sent centurions to collect zebras for him. As can be seen, the number of these incidents are relatively few, but this may be a result of the nature of the sources, which prefer to focus on the more malevolent activities of the commanders.¹⁰⁴

Beyond these few remarks, little more is known about the officers of the guard, though the epigraphic record helps to fill in the gaps somewhat. The idea of a career path for these men – moving from the *vigiles* to the urban cohorts to the praetorians – is prominent in modern scholarship.¹⁰⁵ But the evidence comes from the second century for the most part and it is difficult to know how representative any career pattern is for the earlier period.¹⁰⁶ An example of what was to become a typical career for an officer in the first half of the second century is that of Gaius Arrius Clemens.¹⁰⁷ Clemens began his career as a soldier in the ninth praetorian cohort and then progressed through several junior posts. After reaching the status of *evocatus*, he proceeded to the centurionates, first of the *vigiles*, then of the *statores* (imperial messengers), next of the urban cohorts, and finally of the praetorian guard, the usual progression for soldiers who began their service in Rome. He also managed to reach the primipilate, though he advanced no further.¹⁰⁸

A rare first-century example – that of Lucius Antonius Naso – reveals how difficult it is to establish what is typical of these careers.¹⁰⁹ Naso had a very distinguished career, first in the legions and then as a tribune in the Rome cohorts, beginning with the *vigiles*. His successive posts in the urban cohorts (that of XV urban in Puteoli) were rare occurrences, perhaps explained by the turbulent events of AD 68. The repetition of the praetorian tribunate after being *primuspilus* for a second time is also explained by the unusual events of AD 69, when Naso fell in and out of favour as the emperors changed.¹¹⁰ His assignment as commander of the veterans (of several armies) in Rome was extraordinary as well, but resulted from the civil wars and shows the great confidence which Vespasian had in him.¹¹¹ Although Naso's career sometimes appears in modern texts as typical, it is clear that it is anything but, especially for the first century.¹¹² This is also true of Marcus Vettius Valens, who had an unusual and illustrious career moving from the ranks of the guard under Tiberius to hold an imperial procuratorship under Nero, between which he was decorated by Claudius for service in Britain and reached the rank of

equestrian.¹¹³ Clearly this too is a quite exceptional career.¹¹⁴ Care must be taken, then, when trying to determine how the career paths for the officers of the guard progressed.

Pay and donatives

The date of the formal organization of the guard traditionally has been accepted as 27 BC, the year in which Dio mentions the grant to the praetorians of double the amount of pay that legionaries received: 'Right away, so it seems, for those men who would serve as his bodyguard, [Augustus] obtained by vote double the pay that was given to the other soldiers, in order that he might have a guard devoted to him. In this way, in all truth, did he eagerly desire to settle the monarchy.'¹¹⁵ Despite Dio's suggestion that maintaining loyalty was the rationale behind the increased rate of pay, in fact, distinguishing the status of the unit must have been the emperor's prime motivation.¹¹⁶ The praetorians were an elite corps, loyal only to the emperor, and the need to establish this clearly for both the army and indeed for the populace as a whole was a lesson that Augustus had learned through the years of civil strife. Furthermore, in the imperial period, pay rates reflected the hierarchy of the army and this did not change throughout the history of the empire (that is, soldiers in the auxiliaries received the lowest pay and the praetorians the highest); this was also true of the officers. The additional duties assigned to the guard over time might have made the higher rate of pay more explicable, though being the unit that was most closely associated with the emperor was enough from the outset to ensure that the soldiers were paid generously.¹¹⁷

But how much did the praetorians get paid? The question presents some difficulty, since there is little evidence for any specific figures.¹¹⁸ It is usually proposed, in light of Dio's observation, that the ratio of pay would be twice that of the legionaries, though it is possible that the figures were higher.¹¹⁹ Exact amounts are the subject of some controversy. Tacitus notes that the praetorians received two *denarii* a day in AD 14, double what he claims the legionaries received, and a ratio that corresponds with what Dio provides.¹²⁰ But it is also reported, again by Dio, that upon completion of his period of service, each praetorian soldier received 20,000 sesterces, whereas the legionary soldier received 12,000, a ratio of five to three.¹²¹ Furthermore, in his will, Augustus left the praetorians 1,000 sesterces, the urban cohorts 500 and the legionaries 300.¹²² While these examples indicate that there was a clear distinction of status between

the respective units as noted in the grants, there is no consistency in the ratio given. The way in which the men were paid has been used to try to calculate the amounts more precisely.¹²³ The soldiers received three instalments per year before Domitian, and four thereafter, and so the yearly pay must be divisible by those numbers. But the amounts provided using this method also vary. In fact, it has been pointed out that 'the few facts have been so manipulated by scholars that the resulting statistics are unreliable by their very divergences'.¹²⁴ The exact figure, therefore, seems unrecoverable. In the end, though, it is also not of great significance, since the difference between soldiers was made clear by whatever the ratio: the guard was the emperor's most valued military unit and so was paid more. The key point is that, by 27 BC, Augustus felt secure enough to make the distinction between the provincial armies and his personal army quite clear to the senate and people of Rome.¹²⁵

There is no evidence for an increase in pay for the guard (or the army in general) until the reign of Domitian, nearly 100 years later. That emperor added a fourth instalment, long overdue.¹²⁶ No doubt this grant was one of the reasons why his death was so mourned by the soldiers. It should be remembered that 'soldiers formed part of the rare salaried class in antiquity, and they were relatively affluent', something often overlooked in discussions about pay for soldiers.¹²⁷ That being said, it was not until the reign of Severus in the late second century that another raise was forthcoming.¹²⁸ It is not clear how large an increase this emperor provided, but his son Caracalla also added to the pay for the soldiers, causing hardship for his successor.¹²⁹

Closely associated with the problem of pay is the subject of donatives. There is a common perception that the praetorians were a force that could be bought easily and, in fact, Tacitus mentions that Augustus himself 'seduced the army with gifts'.¹³⁰ Yet that emperor gave only two donatives that are recorded: the first was a distribution to veterans in 29 BC, the second on the occasion of Gaius Caesar's taking part in exercises with the legions in 8 BC. It is not clear whether the guard was included in either of these.¹³¹ In fact, evidence for praetorian reward in this fashion is not apparent in the early years of their history.¹³² The amounts paid on accession were standard from quite early on in the principate (as can be seen by the doubling by Gaius of the legacy in Tiberius' will) but grants at other times were rare. In the first century, donatives were provided to the guard only by Tiberius after the fall of Sejanus in AD 31, by Claudius in

celebrating his date of accession, and by Nero twice: the first after the murder of his mother, Agrippina, and the second after the Pisonian Conspiracy.¹³³ Before AD 193, no other donatives specific to the unit are recorded; while praetorians may have shared in those granted to the army in general, for example, that granted by Domitian after the Dacian War, there are no rewards to them alone.¹³⁴ After the reorganization of the guard, Severus provided a substantial donative to the praetorians on the celebration of his decennalia in AD 203, recorded by Dio to be ten gold coins, and Caracalla gave them a reward after the murder of his brother Geta in AD 211.¹³⁵ As can be seen, the impression of ‘buying’ the loyalty of the guard is not borne out by the evidence.

Location¹³⁶

Where the praetorians were billeted prior to the construction of the *Castra Praetoria* is not clear. Tacitus reports that the soldiers were scattered throughout Rome before AD 23: ‘[Sejanus] extended the power of the prefecture, limited thus far, by bringing together into a single camp the cohorts dispersed throughout the city.’¹³⁷ On the other hand, Suetonius indicates that only some of the cohorts were kept in the capital prior to that date: ‘[Augustus] never permitted more than three cohorts to be in the city, and these were without a camp; the remaining cohorts he had been accustomed to send out to winter and summer camps near neighbouring towns.’¹³⁸ It is not known where those cohorts not yet stationed in the capital were located.¹³⁹ Since this was the first time that troops had been placed in Rome itself, Augustus no doubt considered it prudent to avoid putting so many armed men in the city during the early years of his reign.¹⁴⁰ It also has been suggested that the placement of a large number of troops together may have constituted a threat to Augustus himself, or a temptation to others to try and subvert their loyalty.¹⁴¹ Yet before long, the cohorts were all in Rome. As the use of the guard increased because of the involvement of the praetorians in civil administration, and as the populace became accustomed to the presence of the soldiers in the city, it became more practical to bring the cohorts together in Rome to facilitate coordination of their duties. Thus the discrepancy between Tacitus and Suetonius can be resolved: Suetonius is referring to the earliest period of Augustus’ reign when the number of cohorts in the city was restricted to three, whereas Tacitus is recording the situation just prior to AD 23 when most of the guard was billeted throughout the city but were not yet housed all together

in the Castra Praetoria.¹⁴²

The construction of a camp for the praetorians in the capital, one of the most significant events in their history, was accomplished through the impetus of Tiberius' praetorian prefect, Sejanus, the son of Lucius Seius Strabo, Augustus' last praetorian prefect.¹⁴³ Sejanus joined his father in the prefecture in AD 14; the appointment has been linked with the mutiny in Pannonia following the death of Augustus.¹⁴⁴ But by AD 16, he was the sole prefect.¹⁴⁵ For the next 15 years, Sejanus played a pivotal role in the running of the empire, though it always must be remembered that the position of praetorian prefect was relatively new and that he was responding to the situation as it unfolded rather than taking advantage of an authority already in place. In fact, his relationship with Tiberius was no different than that between Augustus and Agrippa, for example.¹⁴⁶ Yet two honours stand out: Sejanus received the *ornamenta praetoria* (granting him the rank of praetor without having held the office), which shows the esteem in which he was held by Tiberius.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, he was consul with the emperor himself at the start of the year AD 31, a singular honour indeed for an equestrian and a man who had held no other political office.¹⁴⁸ It is unclear exactly what status Sejanus had during the period of his consulship: he may have held both the consulship and the prefecture concurrently.¹⁴⁹ It has been suggested, however, that an interim prefect or a colleague must have been appointed.¹⁵⁰ At any rate, the distinction indicated that he was highly regarded by Tiberius.

The exact date of the establishment of the camp is uncertain: as noted above, Tacitus places the construction in AD 23.¹⁵¹ Conversely, Dio sets the date as AD 20, which seems more likely: given that the motivation came from Sejanus, this would put the decision to build shortly after he became sole prefect.¹⁵² Tacitus adds that he brought all of the cohorts together into one camp so that 'orders might be received at the same time, and confidence fostered among the troops through their number, strength and visibility, the very things that would rouse fear among everyone else'.¹⁵³ The author's language, however, suggests that he considered Sejanus to have an ulterior motive, namely control over the city.¹⁵⁴ Yet the reason for the consolidation of the guard in a single location undoubtedly was pragmatic: to allow better communication and better discipline of a unit that was becoming an integral part of life in Rome.¹⁵⁵ A problem with discipline would not be surprising, especially if the guard had been billeted throughout the capital since its inception; maintaining

control may have become increasingly difficult if the number of cohorts in Rome had gradually increased over previous years as they were brought into the city from the environs.¹⁵⁶ With the principate more firmly established, the precautions taken by Augustus to avoid the appearance of imposing an armed guard on the city no longer were necessary and it certainly would be safer for the citizens to have the cohorts housed together where their activities could be monitored.¹⁵⁷

There persists a tendency to interpret the *Castra Praetoria* as a form of suburban legionary fortress.¹⁵⁸ Examination of the physical remains of the camp show this to be inaccurate and, much like the unit it housed, the camp appears to have been unique.¹⁵⁹ Situated on the highest point of the Viminal Hill, the site commanded both the capital and its vulnerable northeast approaches.¹⁶⁰ Its proximity to Rome ultimately led to the camp being subsumed as the city expanded; by far the best-preserved and most readily accessible portions of the *Castra Praetoria* are those sections of its north and east walls, which became incorporated into the Aurelian city defences.¹⁶¹ The camp's south and west walls apparently were pulled down following the disbandment of the guard by Constantine, but enough traces have been uncovered to confirm the outline of the camp: it was predominantly rectangular in shape with rounded corners. For no apparent reason, the line of the south wall deviates from what would otherwise be a rectangular plan.¹⁶²

The rampart itself was constructed of brick-faced concrete – a daring use on such a large and important structure of a building technique that had been used only sparingly in the Augustan era.¹⁶³ Topped with a wall-walk, parapet and merlons, the walls were nearly five metres in height. In addition, along the length of the circuit were positioned at least 16 towers, which did not project beyond the line of the wall.¹⁶⁴ Presumably there were gates on each of the four sides, though only the north and east gates are preserved.¹⁶⁵ No evidence of a protective system of ditches has been located, which suggests that the *Castra Praetoria* never was intended to be able to withstand a serious assault.¹⁶⁶

Information on the interior of the *Castra Praetoria* has proven difficult to obtain, as urban growth has obscured evidence on the ground. What is known of the interior arrangements can be gleaned from salvage excavations conducted over the past two centuries, but there is no systematic publication of these investigations.¹⁶⁷ With the

exception of only the northernmost portions of the camp, which have remained relatively unexplored, what has come to light thus far illustrates that the general layout of the *Castra Praetoria* bears little resemblance to that of a legionary fortress of the first century AD.¹⁶⁸ The camp is divided symmetrically by four major avenues along its major north–south axis into five distinct zones, and is dominated by two long rows of barrack blocks, the remains of which run almost the entire length of the camp (see Figure 11). A narrow strip of buildings running through the middle of the scheme separates the two main rows of barracks; these consist of rooms arranged around small courtyards and *impluvia* (‘basins’) and perhaps can be identified as officers’ quarters. Bisecting the primary north–south axis of the camp is another major avenue running from the east gate, although its path does not appear to have continued to the west uninterrupted; instead its progress seems to be blocked by a row of highly unusual barracks orientated on a north–south axis. These remains consist of an extended series of vaulted cells sharing a common rear wall and interrupted periodically by stairways at regular intervals; the stairs presumably led to projecting walkways providing access to a similar row of cells on the second-floor.¹⁶⁹ Traces of similar building remains uncovered to the immediate west as well as spatial considerations suggest that there may have been two parallel rows of these unique two-storey barracks.

At the junction of the two major north–south and east–west axes, one normally would expect to find the *principium* (‘headquarters’); however, there is no structure that can clearly be identified as such, nor is there enough space in the existing pattern to accommodate what was typically a very large complex.¹⁷⁰ The lack of such a significant building must be related to the unique nature of the guard’s command structure. Since overall authority of the praetorians ultimately rested with the emperor, it is likely that the bulk of administrative matters concerning the unit were handled in the palace rather than in the camp and, as a result, there would be little need for an elaborate suite of offices there.¹⁷¹ While apparently lacking a distinct administrative centre of its own, the main north–south, east–west intersection of the *Castra Praetoria* still retained a strong symbolic significance as illustrated by the large amount of votive material which has been found in the area over the years. More recent excavations in this area have also revealed that an adjacent barrack block terminated in a large apsidal hall facing the intersection.¹⁷² This room perhaps can be identified with one of several ritual structures

for which there is literary or epigraphic evidence.¹⁷³

There is also no firm evidence among the remains uncovered thus far for any structures that could be acknowledged as houses for the praetorian prefects, that is, buildings equivalent in size and level of appointments to a legionary *praetorium*.¹⁷⁴ This omission is not altogether surprising and again must be related to the organizational structure of the guard. The praetorian prefecture was the highest office that an equestrian could attain, and it is unlikely, therefore, that such important officials would choose to maintain residences in a bustling military compound when the comforts of Rome were so close at hand.¹⁷⁵ Along with the *principium* and *praetoria*, the absence of other readily identifiable building types normally associated with a legionary fortress can be explained by the proximity of the camp to the amenities of the capital. The list includes structures intended to meet the physical and social needs of the soldiers, such as a hospital and baths, as well as the extensive workshops that typically provided the material needs of a unit.¹⁷⁶ Each of these building types has a distinctive design and typically are rather sizeable structures, but as of yet, no evidence for their presence has been detected among the remains of the camp.¹⁷⁷ One building for which there is literary and epigraphic evidence is an imperial armoury, which was located within the walls of the camp.¹⁷⁸ The semi-subterranean structure in the southeast corner of the camp, traditionally identified as a granary, is likely to be this building.¹⁷⁹

Central to any understanding of the layout of the *Castra Praetoria*, then, is the idea that the primary intent was to maximize the number of troops that could be housed there, to the exclusion of almost everything else. The amount of space that was saved by not having to include subsidiary structures is of considerable significance. Moreover, the circuit of the *Castra Praetoria* is notable in that the wall is reinforced by a continuous arcade of cells along its inner face in *opus reticulatum*.¹⁸⁰ The concrete vaults of these cells supported an elevated wall-walk; the cells themselves feature mosaic floors and plastered ceilings, indicating that they were intended to serve as communal living quarters or *contubernia*.¹⁸¹ There is also another, more subtle, method of space saving apparent in the remains of the *Castra Praetoria*: the design of the individual barrack blocks themselves. The efficiencies inherent in the two-storey blocks are self-evident, but the more common single-storey barracks are also unusual in that they were built back-to-back and share a common rear wall instead of

being separated by a narrow alley as is usually the case in legionary examples.¹⁸² When this relatively simple economy is projected over several rows, considerable space saving is achieved.¹⁸³

With this in mind, it is tempting to try and use the evidence of the camp to determine the effective of the guard. In arguing for the cohorts to be 500 strong, one scholar has stated that ‘the archaeological evidence is decisive’.¹⁸⁴ In fact, it is anything but. When looking at the numbers of soldiers that the *Castra Praetoria* could house, it is clear that up to 15,000 men could be accommodated.¹⁸⁵ And this total, in fact, may be a conservative estimate. If the excavated portions of the camp can be used as a guide, the relatively unexplored northern areas undoubtedly contain a higher proportion of barracks to any other building type, and that would push these totals even higher. Any attempt, then, to use the *Castra Praetoria* to determine effective must take into account the ability of the camp to house a very large number of soldiers, and it is not at all clear that the evidence points to the cohorts being quingenary from their inception.

Equipment and uniform

The physical appearance and equipment of the praetorians has been considered extensively in recent years.¹⁸⁶ Despite the increased interest, however, it is difficult to assess this aspect of the unit because the guard does not appear all that frequently in public art in its early history.¹⁸⁷ It is only in the second century that praetorians begin to be represented with any regularity, namely when they take to the field; it may have been considered more acceptable to portray them in battle than in civilian contexts which would serve as a reminder to the viewer of the power behind the principate.¹⁸⁸ Ironically, at the same time as these images appear, it becomes quite difficult to distinguish soldiers of the guard from those of the legions.¹⁸⁹

How the guard appeared in antiquity bears little resemblance to what might be expected, given the way in which the unit has been depicted in modern media. For example, praetorians appear in full armour in the city only rarely. On such occasions, they were either used to impress visiting dignitaries, as when Caratacus came to Rome in AD 50, or to intimidate the senate or the populace, as when Tiberius held a parade of the guard in AD 25.¹⁹⁰ Most of the time, when in the capital, the soldiers dressed simply in tunics. They had the standard military belt and sandals (sometimes with socks) and often wore the usual hooded cloak of citizens and soldiers, namely the

paenulae, especially when travelling.¹⁹¹ Armed with a sword and heavy javelin, they were not helmeted unless in full armour.¹⁹² In fact, the so-called Attic helmets that appear in artistic representations of the guard on public monuments are thought to be an archaizing feature used as a shorthand identification for soldiers and there is little evidence for these on private monuments or in the archaeological record.¹⁹³ A good example of the typical uniform can be seen on the Puteoli monument, where the praetorians are in their travelling garb and are carrying swords, spears and shields.¹⁹⁴ As noted earlier, the identification of these particular soldiers as belonging to the guard comes from the scorpion emblem on one of the shields.¹⁹⁵ The emblazon is one of the few ways to differentiate praetorians from legionary soldiers, for the former made use of a limited number of emblems: the scorpion was a favourite but they also employed winged thunderbolts and lightning (sometimes with moon and stars), or alternately a pattern of vine tendrils.¹⁹⁶ Other monuments that show similar attire (in particular, the girded tunics) include the Cancelleria reliefs, the Anaglypha Traiani/Hadriani and the 'Chatsworth' relief, though these types of images are rare.¹⁹⁷

As was noted earlier, in depictions of battle scenes on monuments such as Trajan's Column, it is often difficult to identify praetorians, for they are usually clad in a similar fashion to the legionary troops.¹⁹⁸ Both wear segmented armour and carry rectangular shields. It is possible that soldiers of the guard had used oval shields in the first century, though the extant evidence is inconclusive: on the *adlocutio* coin of Gaius, the soldiers seem to have rectangular shields and even on the Puteoli monument, they are not distinctly oval, though another *adlocutio* coin, this time of Galba, shows oval shields quite clearly.¹⁹⁹ By the early second century, however, it is clear that they had adopted the rectangular shield, similar to that of the legionary. It is no easier when looking at armour. Soldiers identified as praetorians can be seen in segmental armour on Trajan's Column as well as that of Antoninus Pius.²⁰⁰ From early in the third century, the guard also used scale armour; Dio records how the praetorians were stripped of their breastplates of scale armour in his description of the battle between Elagabalus and Macrinus.²⁰¹ Praetorians clothed in this fashion appear on the Arch of Constantine.²⁰²

Given the similarity in uniform, then, identification of the guard as opposed to legionary soldiers on such monuments is often difficult. And, by the mid-second century, even being depicted close to the

emperor is no guarantee that the soldiers belong to the guard, since other units (e.g. the *equites singulares*) also might be found in that position.²⁰³ Only when praetorians are accompanied by standard bearers in their distinctive lion-skin headdresses, which were used exclusively by the guard, can the identification be certain, since legionary standard bearers wore bear skins. Praetorian standards were also unusual in that they had the *imagines* ('portraits of the emperor') attached to them, rather than carried separately, providing yet another clue.²⁰⁴

Of great importance in any discussion of the appearance of the guard is the tradition that the praetorians, when on duty at the palace or in Rome, wore togas.²⁰⁵ Yet, the evidence is rather circumstantial. Indeed, the assertion regarding this mode of uniform for praetorians is a misunderstanding of the literary sources. The passages most often cited are both from Tacitus. First, during the trial of Thræsa Paetus in AD 66, the author describes the high level of security put in place by Nero: 'The next morning two armed praetorian cohorts were present in the temple of Venus Genetrix; a throng of men in togas had occupied the entrance to the senate, with swords in the open, and wedges of soldiers were dispersed throughout the fora and basilicas.'²⁰⁶ The second example occurs in a speech attributed to Otho early in AD 69 in which the guard that are with Galba in the palace are described: 'I am not calling on you to go to war or put yourselves in danger; all armed soldiers are on our side. That single togaed cohort does not defend Galba so much as keep him prisoner.'²⁰⁷

Neither of these passages, however, is conclusive in placing the guard in togas, whether at the palace or in the capital. In the first example, the crucial factor is that the area was thronging with soldiers and that praetorian cohorts had taken up a position in the temple itself, a situation that undoubtedly would provoke dismay on the part of many citizens. But the armed individuals described as wearing togas are not specified as soldiers and should not be identified as praetorians.²⁰⁸ It is possible that they were supporters sent by Nero to intimidate the senators further: given that, in usual circumstances, it was prohibited for citizens to carry weapons, their appearance would highlight the dangers for the senators in not acting in Nero's interest. In the example from the *Histories*, the context is of great significance: in trying to inspire his own praetorians in the coming struggle against Galba, Otho belittles the ability of those soldiers protecting the emperor by referring to them as if they are nothing more than

civilians – that is, they are nothing to be feared – and the way in which he does this is to refer to them as being clothed in togas. If the comment referred to the way in which the praetorians actually were dressed at the palace, it would lose its effect.²⁰⁹ Furthermore, there is the impracticality of having praetorians – whose primary task was to protect the imperial family after all – dressed in a garment that was notoriously cumbersome. The restriction of movement for any soldiers in togas would render them ineffectual, if there was a need to pursue and apprehend a target.²¹⁰ These references, then, must be dismissed as evidence for the way in which the guard was dressed in Rome.

In addition, two other passages adduced in support of the Tacitean passages must be rejected. These are an epitaph by Martial for Cornelius Fuscus, praetorian prefect under Domitian, and a passage from Epictetus' *Discourses*.²¹¹ In the first, that the prefect might be clothed in a toga is not surprising, in particular given his role in judicial matters; it need not mean that the rest of the unit was attired in similar fashion.²¹² And while the second passage does make reference to a soldier dressed as a citizen, it is clear from the context that he is working as a spy.²¹³ He entices his fellow spectator at the games to criticize the emperor, only to then haul him off to prison. In this case, the soldier is in disguise, and that disguise may well be a toga, though given the date (second century AD) and the unpopularity of the garment at that time, this is not certain; at any rate, the clandestine nature of the activity suggests a departure from the norm and the reference would not work if every praetorian had been dressed similarly.



The imperial praetorian guard, then, was part of the very fabric of the city of Rome from early on in its history. The soldiers no doubt enjoyed the higher status that came with being part of the elite force, with its better pay and working conditions, along with the increased chance of promotion, due to their closeness to the emperor, an honour in itself. Furthermore, their camp would have served as a constant reminder of the power inherent in the principate. Yet the sources usually portray the praetorians as an indolent and pampered unit. That this is far from the truth can be seen from the nature of their duties, which is covered in the next chapter.

DUTIES

One of the most interesting aspects of the praetorian guard is how quickly it became integrated into the workings of Rome. Although established as a unit whose primary task was to protect the emperor and his family, within a short time the praetorians were involved in many other duties in the capital and beyond. These tasks evolved from the primary function of the praetorians as the imperial bodyguard and from the close relationship between the emperor and the guard; they were influenced as well by the way in which praetorian cohorts had been employed in the late republic (see [Chapter 2](#)). As the presence of soldiers became more acceptable in Rome, praetorians were able to be used in circumstances where previously there had been no organized response or to supplement other services that did exist. It is not the case, however, that the way the unit evolved was inherent in its character from the start. The development of the guard from a group whose primary purpose was to oversee the protection of the emperor and his family into a force that had various functions in the state, some of which could be considered objectionable, was a response to the requirements of a nascent imperial system.

Moreover that the praetorians changed from a unit that obeyed orders without question, no matter the task, to one that, only 50 years into their existence, was willing to murder the man they had sworn to protect, had more to do with the nature of the Roman state in the early first century AD than with the guard itself. It was in response to the political events of the times that the soldiers were drawn into intrigue and, on occasion, driven to forswear their oaths. The broadening scope of their duties not only provided them with additional responsibilities but also inserted them into the administration of the city in a way that made them visible and likely to be influenced. For this reason, a significant consideration in the assignment of the guard to the range of tasks discussed in this chapter was the need to keep such a large force in Rome occupied. The challenge became even more important with the increase in the number of cohorts under Tiberius: the use of the praetorians in such a wide variety of duties was the most practical means to keep the soldiers active and not sitting idle in their camp. Moreover, the extended use of the guard in the capital was advantageous not only to

the city itself but also to the emperor, whose benevolence could be promulgated at the same time as his power was visibly demonstrated by the constant reminder of the armed force he had supporting him.

Imperial bodyguard

The protection of the emperor – and his family – was the primary function of the praetorian guard throughout its history. As Campbell notes, ‘The Roman emperor faced the same problems of personal security as most modern rulers. He was expected to appear in public at the games, in processions, in the senate house, and in the streets of Rome.’¹ It was the duty of the praetorians to provide protection in such cases and there is good evidence that they did. Guard members accompanied the emperor in the senate, from the reign of Tiberius if not before.² They were present at the games as an escort; when the emperor was overseeing activities in the capital, praetorians were with him.³ Certainly whenever the emperor left Rome, some of the guard went with him. For example, praetorians went with Claudius to Britain and with Nero to Greece; they accompanied Caracalla to the east.⁴ There is also evidence, in the form of graffiti and gravestones, for the guard at Pompeii, which may suggest that soldiers were with the emperor there; it has even been suggested that there may have been a detachment of the guard stationed near Nuceria, but the evidence is too limited to be conclusive.⁵

Of course, praetorians would be with the emperor when he went to war, as has been noted already with Trajan and Marcus Aurelius.⁶ Yet there are also occasions when there was no security and it may be wrong to assume that everywhere the emperor went, so too went the guard.⁷ Trajan, for example, is said to have gone into the houses of citizens without his bodyguard.⁸ This freedom of movement was seen as a hallmark of that emperor’s greatness.⁹ Nero was also known to have gone out without any troops: the Pisonian conspirators considered murdering him when he was at Baiae, a place he ‘often frequented, taking part in baths and banquets, with his bodyguard (*excubiae*) removed’.¹⁰ The same emperor was known to have prowled the streets of Rome at night in disguise, causing disruption; after he himself had come under attack, he always ensured that he had members of the guard with him.¹¹ It is difficult to argue, therefore, that praetorians were with the emperor always: the practice varied from ruler to ruler and no doubt varied as well according to the attitude of the people towards that rule.¹²

The one place that had a permanent watch of praetorians was the

palace. This guard is thought to have consisted of a single cohort, based on the language used in Tacitus and Suetonius.¹³ It is difficult to know the routine that the cohort followed, that is, how the rotation worked. That a change occurred at the eighth hour (around two in the afternoon) has been asserted, based on a passage in Martial.¹⁴ The situation at the games where Gaius was murdered – shortly after midday but at the change of the guard – adds weight to this theory. But it is difficult to know for certain, given the paucity of information, and it is possible that there were several shifts over the course of the day. It was to the commander of this cohort that the emperor gave the watchword, viewed by the sources as symbolic of control of the empire. Tacitus, for example, records that at the very start of his reign Tiberius made a show of referring business to the consuls, then adds by way of contrast ‘but on the death of Augustus, he had given the watchword to the praetorian cohorts as their commander (*imperator*)’.¹⁵ It was this act in particular which indicated that the transition of power to one man had taken place.¹⁶ Furthermore, the significance of specific watchwords is emphasized in the sources because of the way in which these words might reflect aspects of individual reigns. For example, Chaerea was said to have been incensed by Gaius’ constant use of effeminate watchwords when he was tribune of the cohort coming on duty, considering it a slight to his masculinity.¹⁷ The watchword given by Nero in praise of his mother, Agrippina, is also singled out in the sources, as is that given by Antoninus Pius on his deathbed.¹⁸ Regardless of the veracity of such information, the presentation of the watchword in the sources in this way not only reflects characteristics of these reigns, but also highlights the inherent military nature of the principate.

Nevertheless, even within the confines of the palace, it is not certain that the emperor always had praetorians with him. Perhaps the best example to illustrate this is the assassination of Domitian in September AD 96.¹⁹ The murder took place in the emperor’s chambers; the main individuals behind it were Stephanus, a freedman of Domitilla (the emperor’s niece), under investigation for embezzlement, and Parthenius, the head chamberlain.²⁰ Although the assumption is often made that the praetorians were involved in this plot, in fact the evidence does not point in that direction. Neither of the two main sources makes any mention of the guard either being in the vicinity when Domitian was killed or coming to his assistance after he had been attacked – this despite the fact that the emperor was said to have become increasingly paranoid as his reign progressed and the

day that had been foretold for his death approached.²¹ Many scholars argue that the prefects at least had to have knowledge of the plan – and to have approved of it – in order for it to be successful.²² But even if the commanders were aware of the plan, which is not at all certain, that does not suggest the involvement of their soldiers. In this instance, then, the absence of the praetorians suggests that, while a cohort was on duty in the palace at all times, this did not necessarily mean that soldiers were in constant attendance upon the emperor.

Additionally, there must have been some protection for the imperial family other than the emperor. But it is not clear who received this privilege nor how many men it entailed.²³ That the honour was given at the discretion of the emperor is revealed by the situation of Agrippina. A year after Nero came to power, when his mother's interference was becoming too much, he removed her from the palace and took away her guard; Tacitus notes that these were men who accompanied her as the mother of the emperor, just as they had when she was the wife of the previous emperor.²⁴ At the same time, Nero was surrounded by a large group of officers whenever he went to visit Agrippina in her new residence and, according to Dio, he declared that only the emperor should have soldiers to guard him.²⁵ It was not just that protection no longer was provided for Agrippina that was important but, more significantly, her loss of status. In fact, shortly after the removal of her guard, Agrippina was accused of conspiring against her son; it is obvious that her vulnerability left her open to such charges.²⁶ And within a few years, she had been murdered.²⁷

Specific mention of the presence of the guard with family members is infrequent in the sources. Praetorians formed part of the contingent that went north to quell unrest at the beginning of Tiberius' reign. They accompanied Drusus to Pannonia in AD 14 to suppress a rebellion among the legionaries.²⁸ The cohorts had been strengthened beyond their regular effective and were reinforced by both praetorian cavalry and German bodyguards. These precautions proved to be necessary, for the rebels among the legions in Pannonia were intent on making trouble; in fact, Drusus had the ringleaders of the mutiny executed, some by praetorians.²⁹ Very little is known about the role of the guard in the expedition with Germanicus, only that praetorians, along with selected guard cavalry, provided protection for him in battle.³⁰ On both of these occasions, two cohorts of praetorians were sent. These examples were used to argue that this was the number of

cohorts that regularly accompanied members of the imperial family.³¹ In addition, the episode when Agrippina the Elder brought back the ashes of Germanicus to Rome has been adduced: again, two cohorts of praetorians were dispatched by Tiberius to accompany them to the capital.³² But if this interpretation is right, the number of men involved is excessive, even if an effective of 500 is postulated and it makes more sense to see these as atypical events. In the case of Agrippina the Elder, the praetorians surely formed part of an honour guard and therefore the sizeable number is not unexpected. The other two are military operations, which undoubtedly necessitated the presence of such a large contingent; the use of praetorians in these cases echoes the ways in which such troops were used in the late republic. Here, though, they also would have provided a show of status in addition to serving a practical purpose; furthermore, it is possible that the praetorians were there to keep an eye on Drusus and Germanicus, ensuring that their actions were taken on behalf of the emperor. Indeed, that praetorians were chosen to go north with Drusus is curious, for one of the complaints of the army was the preferred status given to the cohorts at Rome, and Tacitus records that members of the guard were harassed by their legionary counterparts in the hope of provoking a confrontation.³³ It may have been an acknowledgement of the potential for just such a conflict that led to the sending of the praetorians with Drusus in the first place.³⁴

Other examples of the guard accompanying members of the imperial family are rare. For example, Dio records that Julia Domna did not lose her guard of praetorians after the death of her son, the emperor Caracalla, in AD 217.³⁵ Alexander Severus, when only Caesar, had a contingent of praetorians to protect him.³⁶ But the sources in general are silent on this aspect, though it is tempting to think that any individual of the imperial family who needed protection would be granted it. As the example of Agrippina shows, however, what was given could also be taken away.

Securing the state

Another central function of the guard was the protection of the state. While this responsibility is most obvious during times of war, there were also occasions when the praetorians were sent from Rome to quell disturbances in peacetime. Their presence on such missions can be viewed as representing the direct intervention of the *princeps*. Two examples will illustrate their importance in such situations.³⁷

Under Tiberius, the guard was called upon to prevent a slave

rebellion led by one of its veterans, Titus Curtilius.³⁸ In AD 24, this former guardsman was holding secret meetings in Brundisium and the surrounding area and issuing pamphlets to incite the slaves there to revolt. The initial response against the uprising came from a quaestor in the area who made use of crews from patrol ships which happened to have docked at the port, but his effort did not accomplish anything. As a result, Tiberius quickly dispatched a tribune of the guard, named in the text as Staius but otherwise unknown, along with a force of praetorians, to capture Curtilius and bring him to Rome. Tacitus adds that there was great fear in the capital because of the large number of slaves there, and this may explain why the emperor's personal guard was chosen: the citizens could be reassured that everything possible was being done. It may also be the case that those sent were familiar with the man who was leading the revolt. Curtilius, in fact, was quickly apprehended and without difficulty, suggesting that he was known to his captors.

The second example comes from the reign of Nero. In AD 58, the citizens of Puteoli were upset over embezzlement by local officials, with the council complaining about public disorder.³⁹ The situation escalated to rioting and so the senate appointed Gaius Cassius Longinus to settle the matter, but the citizens were unwilling to tolerate his severity and so he asked to be relieved of the responsibility.⁴⁰ It was given instead to the brothers Scribonii, Rufus and Proculus.⁴¹ They were provided with a praetorian cohort, the first and only time under the Julio-Claudians that a contingent of the guard was given over to the command of men of consular rank. Tacitus records that the situation was brought under control because the citizens of Puteoli were afraid of the soldiers; this fear no doubt resulted from the executions which the commanders ordered.⁴² By sending his own guard, Nero was showing that he took a personal interest in the matter.⁴³ It was at the request of Cassius that the Scribonii were sent, and the addition of a cohort of praetorians may have been necessary if it had been decided beforehand that executions would take place, since that was one of the responsibilities of the guard (see below).

In Rome, however, it usually fell to the urban cohorts to ensure public order, though they were not used exclusively and sometimes it is difficult to ascertain which city unit was involved.⁴⁴ Indeed, there are a number of examples in the sources of citizens being arrested, sometimes imprisoned and on occasion executed, but without any reference to who performed these deeds. By way of illustration one

might consider the case of the ex-praetor Considius Proculus, who was arrested while celebrating his birthday. Charged with treason, he was condemned in the senate and immediately executed, though without any indication of who carried out the act.⁴⁵ In cases which required a high degree of security or which involved members of the nobility, however, it is the guard that appears most frequently. From early in the history of the principate, praetorians were being used for surveillance of those who were deemed a threat to the state; furthermore, they occasionally were involved in the execution of those condemned. It should be noted that, for the most part, all of these tasks involved members of the upper classes of Roman society and almost all of the examples are political in nature.⁴⁶

In the first century AD tasks such as these often fell to those members of the guard known as the *speculatores*, 'scouts' or 'spies'. These soldiers were employed in matters that involved issues of national security or where there was a need for covert activity. As a result, information is scarce in the sources. In the republic, *speculatores* were used primarily for reconnoitring.⁴⁷ On occasion these men were used as a bodyguard.⁴⁸ In fact, Antony had a cohort of *speculatores*, which he commemorated on his coinage and which may have performed both roles.⁴⁹ The imperial unit associated with the guard undoubtedly was adapted from this republican prototype early in the reign of Augustus.⁵⁰ Although the evidence is limited, it is probable that, for much of the first century AD, the *speculatores* associated with the praetorians formed a unit of their own, but technically were considered part of the guard. Evidence for this comes from the civil war in AD 69, for it was the *tesserarius speculatorum*, joined by the *optio*, who were first approached by Otho to win over the guard in his campaign for emperor.⁵¹ By the end of the first century AD, however, the *speculatores* had been distributed throughout the praetorian cohorts. This may have happened in the reign of Vitellius; since the *speculatores* had been responsible for the accession of Otho and had fought in the field with him, their continued existence as a separate unit might have been deemed undesirable.⁵² A close relationship between emperor and *speculatores* existed from the creation of the unit; Suetonius records how Augustus entertained a former *speculator* at whose home he had often stayed.⁵³ This special association is also illustrated by inscriptions from the same period that refer to *speculatores Caesaris*.⁵⁴ The phrase *speculator Caesaris* (or *Augusti*) occurs only in the early part of the first century AD; at some point, the title becomes simply *speculator*, as noted on grave stelae from later

that century.⁵⁵ Evidently there was no longer a need to designate these men as ‘belonging’ to the emperor by this time, since it was clear that all forces did anyway.⁵⁶ The significance of the *speculatores* is also shown by one of the earliest extant military diplomata in which members of the unit are singled out, and placed first, in the list of those honoured in the document.⁵⁷

It is not certain how many men comprised this unit. By the middle of the first century AD, the *speculatores* were commanded by a *trecenarius* and this title led to the conjecture that the unit had 300 men.⁵⁸ Such a number is not corroborated by other evidence, however.⁵⁹ There is also controversy over whether all of these soldiers were mounted.⁶⁰ Given their wide-ranging roles, it would have been impractical for all of them to be so. On the other hand, to have a special unit in Rome functioning as mounted bodyguards (beyond the usual praetorian cavalry) would be convenient, given the problem with crowd control. With this in mind, the *speculatores* had a distinctive weapon, the *lancea*, a lance with a knob on one end and a blade on the other.⁶¹ And since their responsibilities included couriering imperial correspondence it is certain that at least some of them were mounted. For example, it was undoubtedly members of this unit that Sejanus employed to convey correspondence between Rome and Capri after Tiberius’ withdrawal to the island and, as has been noted, the same group would have been used by Macro to communicate the information about Tiberius’ death at Misenum to the provincial governors. In the latter instance, sending the *speculatores* allowed reports of the reaction of those to whom he had sent his messages to be brought back to Macro.⁶² Specific references to their role as couriers are uncommon, but Suetonius records one example: ‘[Gaius] sent an eloquent letter to Rome, and warned the *speculatores* to press on in their vehicle to the Forum and right up to the senate house and only to hand it to the consuls in the temple of Mars with all the senate present.’⁶³ Note the element of theatricality here, in that the soldiers are to make a dramatic entrance before the entire senate; the specific use of *speculatores* in this case is an important point, given what was probably their most important role, namely that of spies.

The sources do not provide many specific examples of this activity, which is not surprising given its nature.⁶⁴ Dio, however, comments on the need for spies in a system such as that which Augustus has implemented: ‘Since it is necessary ... that there be some men who both listen covertly and watch closely with respect to everything that

pertains to your rule, you must have such agents in order that you might not be ignorant of anything that needs scrutiny or modification.⁶⁵ Likewise Philostratus, in his *Life of Apollonius*, records that Nero's praetorian prefect Tigellinus used 'all the eyes with which the government sees' to watch Apollonius; it is hard not to interpret this as referring to the *speculatores*, though they are not mentioned specifically.⁶⁶ In one of the few explicit references we have, Suetonius reports that *speculatores* accompanied Claudius to banquets, there simply to observe, that is, to spy on the dinner guests.⁶⁷ And, as has been noted already, in AD 69 Otho sought out members of the *speculatores* when he decided to challenge Galba: it is easy to see why, given their clandestine character. In fact, the unit continued to operate even after the creation of the *frumentarii*, who undertook similar activities.⁶⁸ It is clear that the *speculatores* had proven their value to the imperial system.⁶⁹

It is possible to detect the guard – in many cases, probably the *speculatores* – keeping an eye on those whom the emperor deemed a threat or who were waiting to be tried.⁷⁰ Sometimes this surveillance resulted in the suicide of the accused. For example, in AD 16, Marcus Scribonius Libo Drusus was charged with conspiracy. He was granted an adjournment during his trial and allowed to return to his house, accompanied by soldiers.⁷¹ Tacitus describes the guard as disturbing the dinner-party which Libo had decided to give as his final act: 'his house was surrounded by soldiers, they were making a racket in the entrance in order that they could be heard and be seen'. It seems clear that the intention here was to coerce Libo to kill himself once he realized that there was no hope of escaping conviction.⁷² Perhaps the most well-known case of this sort is that of Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso. Charged with various transgressions, including having invaded a province illegally and corrupting the army, he was tried for treason in AD 20 upon his return to Rome from the east.⁷³ After his trial, he was sent home under guard, specifically a praetorian tribune, though Tacitus says that it was not clear whether the soldier was there to ensure Piso's safety or his death.⁷⁴ Piso killed himself after being rejected by both the senate and Tiberius, but constant surveillance by a praetorian officer no doubt would have added to his desperation, and in fact, there was a rumour that he had been murdered.⁷⁵

Enforced suicides such as these have been seen as constituting 'hybrid self-execution which, conveniently for the emperor, could be thought of as both criminal-free and victimless'.⁷⁶ The praetorians

persuaded the accused through intimidation to perform an action which would exonerate the emperor from the murder of a prominent citizen and would allow him to claim that he would have interceded on behalf of the defendant had he been found guilty.⁷⁷ There are several examples of individuals who opted to take their lives rather than prolong the uncertainty when the praetorians arrived.⁷⁸

Members of the imperial family also endured detention by the guard. In the reign of Tiberius, for example, praetorians were used to provide information to Sejanus about the actions of Agrippina the Elder and her son Nero Caesar; Tacitus adds that everything was recorded ‘as if in annals’, which suggests a highly detailed account of their daily existence.⁷⁹ The result was charges against Agrippina the Elder and her son; they initially were kept under house arrest, with praetorians to guard them. After their trial in AD 29, both were exiled: Agrippina the Elder to Pandateria, Nero to Pontia. Whenever they were moved after this, they were bound and kept under heavy guard to prevent anyone making contact with them.⁸⁰ Suetonius includes the rumour that an executioner was sent to Nero in exile, the appearance of whom led him to kill himself.⁸¹ Again, the implication is that the arrival of this figure was enough to ensure the suicide, whether or not that was the intention.⁸² Nero’s brother Drusus also suffered, imprisoned on the Palatine after being declared a public enemy.⁸³ Given the location, supervision by soldiers would be likely.⁸⁴ Tacitus adds that Drusus was beaten by a centurion named Attius who recorded his final words and announced them to the senate.⁸⁵ It is clear that the guard was engaged in surveillance as well as confinement in these cases. And it was not only under Tiberius that such events occurred: perhaps the most poignant example is that of Nero’s former wife, Octavia, the daughter of Claudius. Banished to Campania in AD 62 at the behest of Poppaea Sabina, Nero’s new wife, she was watched over by praetorians. But her popularity was a problem for the emperor: Tacitus records that the guard was used to disperse a crowd which had rioted and broken into the palace when they thought that she had been restored to her previous position. As a result, she was moved to Pandateria, where she was put to death a short time later.⁸⁶ Ironically, the unit that usually had a role in protecting family members turned out in these instances to be the instrument of their destruction.

The guard also had to staff the prison in the *Castra Praetoria*.⁸⁷ Most of those kept here were high-profile prisoners such as Herod

Agrippa, who was accused of seditious speech in AD 36 and imprisoned on the orders of Tiberius.⁸⁸ Arrested by Macro, he was kept chained to a soldier while in transport; that this was common practice at the time is shown by Seneca.⁸⁹ At the request of Antonia, Tiberius' sister-in-law, Agrippa was granted several concessions by Macro; it is clear, therefore, that he was being held in the prison of the camp.⁹⁰ Agrippa was on the way to the baths when news came of Tiberius' death and later that same day, the centurion who was in charge of Agrippa's guards invited his prisoner to dine with him.⁹¹ Yet, when Agrippa was released to house arrest early in the reign of Gaius, the instructions for this move were contained in a letter that was brought to the urban prefect, Lucius Calpurnius Piso. It appears that, as long as Agrippa was housed in the *Castra Praetoria*, he was under the supervision of Macro, but judicial responsibility continued to rest with the urban prefect.⁹² The practice of housing important prisoners in a high-security location, such as the prison in the camp, was no doubt to ensure their isolation from supporters.⁹³

One of the main tasks of the guard, then, was to keep an eye on those deemed a threat to the state.⁹⁴ Praetorians appear to have participated in surveillance only in political cases which involved the nobility and especially those who had any connection with the imperial family. That such activity was the norm can be seen from Dio, who records that Marcus Aurelius did not put under guard senators who had been linked with Avidius Cassius in his rebellion against the emperor in AD 175; the fact that this was not done was deemed noteworthy.⁹⁵ It was partly for purposes of intimidation that these men were used, for the arrival of a soldier from the guard indicated to the accused that his fate was sealed, and often provided the catalyst for the victim's suicide.

That the praetorians served as executioners is not surprising, then, given such duties. Since surveillance may be viewed as part of the responsibility to ensure the safety of the emperor, it follows that occasionally there was a need to 'remove' an individual who was deemed a threat. It might be expected that *speculatores* of the guard often were used as executioners since these deeds needed to be accomplished quickly and quietly. Such acts are evident in the sources from the reign of Tiberius, but may derive from earlier practice.⁹⁶ The emergence of the treason trials under that emperor and his paranoia about security, which increased over the years and in particular after the fall of Sejanus, resulted in the deaths of many prominent

Romans.⁹⁷ Other emperors followed suit. Given the nature of this activity, there is not much detail on executions in the sources; often there is a name and sometimes a charge, but little else, though occasionally further information is provided. For example, Titius Sabinus, an *eques* of renown, deceived by former praetors to speak his mind regarding Tiberius, then charged with treason, was held in prison and executed.⁹⁸ Vibulenus Agrippa took poison in the senate house and was carted off to prison to be executed.⁹⁹ Sextus Paconianus was strangled in prison because he had composed verses critical of the emperor while there.¹⁰⁰ A high-profile example is that of Seneca who, in the aftermath of the Pisonian Conspiracy, was brought the order to die; according to Dio, soldiers in attendance had to help him commit suicide.¹⁰¹

As well as the need for action when treason was suspected, executions obviously were necessary when there was clear evidence of a conspiracy against the emperor. Often there is little information about these plots in the sources, with those that were successful – against Gaius or Commodus, for example – being related in greater detail (see [Chapter 2](#)). But it is expected that, for most of those that failed, the guard was instrumental in removing the accused. For example, a praetorian officer acted as the agent in the execution of Marcus Aemilius Lepidus in AD 39. The emperor, accompanied by members of the guard, went north apparently to suppress an emerging conspiracy involving Lepidus and Cornelius Lentulus Gaetulicus.¹⁰² It is impossible to determine the sequence of events that resulted in the deaths of the two alleged conspirators but, given the presence of praetorians, it is reasonable to see those soldiers as the means by which this was accomplished. In fact, Seneca even records the name of the tribune who executed Lepidus; this individual was probably the commander of one of the cohorts that was with Gaius. With the need for swift and decisive action, given the danger posed and the high profile of the conspirators, it might be expected that the *speculatores* were used.¹⁰³

Given the nature of the principate, executions were part of the mechanism by which the emperors ruled and, on occasion, the reasons for such orders being given seem slight or incomprehensible. An early example is that of Sempronius Gracchus, exiled by Augustus because of his involvement with Julia; he survived until Tiberius' accession, when soldiers were sent to kill him.¹⁰⁴ Claudius is said to have executed 35 senators and over 300 equestrians, apparently acting in

such a cavalier fashion that when a centurion reported the death of an ex-consul, the emperor denied ever having given the order, but approved of the action because the soldiers had been vigilant in avenging him without instructions.¹⁰⁵ Valerius Asiaticus was one such victim. Charged with adultery and tampering with the army, he was arrested by the prefect of the guard, Rufrius Crispinus, who was accompanied by soldiers under heavy arms, as Tacitus puts it.¹⁰⁶ Asiaticus was returned in chains from Baiae to Rome and dealt with in a private trial. It is obvious from the way in which he was handled that Claudius took seriously the threat this man represented. Yet, according to Dio, Asiaticus almost escaped death, and would have done so had it not been for Claudius' wife, Messalina. Acting through Lucius Vitellius, a member of the *consilium* which was hearing the charges, she remained insistent on his conviction.¹⁰⁷ Crispinus was rewarded well, being given one and a half million sesterces and an honorary praetorship – excessive compensation for an arrest.¹⁰⁸

Nero continued the tradition.¹⁰⁹ Two examples will suffice. Rubellius Plautus was executed while in exile in Asia, though he was guilty only of arousing Nero's fears: a comet had appeared, a portent of a change of power it was believed, and as the great-great-grandson of Augustus, Plautus became a target.¹¹⁰ A large number of soldiers was sent by the praetorian prefect Tigellinus; though warned in advance of their arrival, Plautus refused to flee or to fight and was killed by a centurion.¹¹¹ Tacitus connects this execution with that of Faustus Cornelius Sulla Felix, in exile in Gaul, who was murdered at dinner by assassins, undoubtedly praetorians since the order also came from Tigellinus.¹¹²

Evidence for such activity beyond the Julio-Claudians is more difficult to find because of the nature of the sources. Titus, as praetorian prefect under Vespasian, is said to have used the guard to remove anyone deemed to be a threat; these men were denounced by his agents and then executed.¹¹³ A specific example is the murder of Aulus Caecina in AD 79 after he had dined with Vespasian in the palace; thought to be conspiring with the praetorians, he was killed as he left the feast. The location suggests the involvement of the guard.¹¹⁴ It is clear that Domitian followed earlier practice, executing several senators for treason.¹¹⁵ Though there is no indication in the sources as to who carried out this task, in most cases it undoubtedly fell to the guard; as was the case with previous emperors, the need to entrust such a duty to men who could be relied upon to act without

question, given the status of those being killed, meant that the praetorians were the logical choice.¹¹⁶ Dio adds that Domitian handled these sentences in much the same way as earlier emperors had done: 'He destroyed many who had been forced into exile and indeed for not a few of these he secured their deaths by their own hands in some way or other, so that they seemed to suffer this voluntarily and not through force.'¹¹⁷ Hadrian also was said to have removed senators deemed a threat, as he did upon his accession.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, he had Julius Servianus, his brother-in-law and former rival, executed along with Servianus' grandson in AD 136.¹¹⁹ The usual explanation for these deaths has to do with the succession: Hadrian had been ill and it is thought that Servianus, despite being 90, had seen his opportunity for power.¹²⁰ Again one can guess at the role of the praetorians here, given the status of the accused. So, although there is not detailed evidence in many of these later cases, as might be expected given the nature of the task, the tradition of using the guard for executions in its early history lends credibility to its continued use in the second and third centuries.

Praetorians were compelled to carry out the wishes of the emperor, even if that should extend to killing members of the imperial family. Such a task needed to be done quickly and efficiently and with a minimum of fuss, and the guard was at hand to do what was ordered without question and with little or no concern for the correctness or legality of its actions.¹²¹ The murder of Nero's half-brother Britannicus is a case in point: the emperor was forced to do this secretly since there was no charge that could be brought against him. The agent was the infamous poisoner Locusta, who was in prison (presumably that of the *Castra Praetoria*), guarded by a praetorian tribune named by Tacitus as Julius Pollio.¹²² The involvement of the officer was necessitated by the need for subterfuge, since Britannicus had support in the city. The official version – that the young man had succumbed to a natural death – seems to have been widely accepted, if not completely believed.¹²³ There is no record of any response from the praetorians to this incident, but the absence of a donative to them after such a high-profile death suggests that they accepted the official explanation.¹²⁴

The murder of Tiberius Gemellus by Gaius provides another example; it is recorded that a praetorian tribune was sent to ensure his death.¹²⁵ Philo records that the officer had to help Gemellus because he did not know how to kill himself with the sword he was given.¹²⁶

The presence of a tribune from the emperor's personal guard coupled with the absence of any announcement to the senate of Gemellus' death suggests it was intended that the incident would be kept quiet.

Perhaps the most sensational of these deaths occurred in AD 48, when it was alleged that a mock marriage had taken place between Messalina, wife of the emperor Claudius, and Gaius Silius, consul-elect.¹²⁷ Claudius, assisted by his inner circle, took quick action and members of the guard were dispatched to arrest those who had been in attendance.¹²⁸ The emperor himself was conveyed to the *Castra Praetoria* to reaffirm the loyalty of the praetorians.¹²⁹ They called out for retribution. By this time, several of those who had been present at the party had been brought to the camp by centurions of the guard. They were tried there by the soldiers – an unusual method, but an extension of trials *intra cubiculum* (i.e. behind closed doors) – and executed, Silius among them.¹³⁰ By allowing the soldiers to have a say in the fate of those charged, the emperor provided them with the opportunity to reassert their loyalty. The next step was the removal of Messalina; officers of the guard were sent, allegedly by the emperor himself, to kill her.¹³¹ Although Messalina tried to kill herself when she knew that there was no hope, she could not do it, and the tribune was forced to provide the final blow.¹³² There is no record of the reaction of the guard to the murder of the empress and no mention of a donative, which might be expected after such an incident.¹³³

One of the most interesting examples – especially for what it reveals about the difficulty in interpreting such episodes early in the principate – is the execution of Agrippa Postumus in AD 14, immediately after the death of Augustus.¹³⁴ Postumus had been exiled by the emperor in AD 6, a mere two years after his adoption. Sent first to Surrentum, he was transferred a year later to the island of Planasia, ostensibly because of his increasing madness, but more likely because of the risk of keeping him on the mainland where he could be accessed more easily.¹³⁵ The murder is the first act of the new regime recorded in the sources, and a praetorian officer acts as agent; no doubt this was one of the soldiers who had been guarding Postumus so that the emperor could be kept informed of his activities.¹³⁶ Tacitus notes that the man found the task difficult, though he was of firm resolve.¹³⁷ Although the soldiers had sworn to ensure the security of the imperial family as well as that of the emperor, this incident clearly illustrates the pragmatism of the guard. The praetorians, and especially the officers, acknowledged that sometimes there would be a

conflict between their oath and the demands of the emperor. Therefore, when a direct order was issued from the *princeps* which contravened this pledge, the choice was simple: the man who was their commander-in-chief must be obeyed.¹³⁸ It is informative that, immediately after the murder, Livia is said to have been warned that certain things were best left undisclosed, among which were duties performed by the military.¹³⁹ The need for such secrecy in many executions no doubt provided the rationale for using praetorians, and in particular, the *speculatores*.¹⁴⁰

Policing events¹⁴¹

Spectacles were of major importance to the ancient Romans. Under the empire, these events included the theatre, the arena and the circus; the latter two were venues for gladiatorial combat and beast hunts and, in the case of the circus, horse-racing.¹⁴² During the reigns of the Julio-Claudians, the number of days on which spectacles were held averaged roughly 90; they steadily increased throughout the imperial period.¹⁴³ Given the population of Rome, the need for security at such events was considerable; moreover, factionalism over actors in the theatre or the colours at the circus was well known.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, some sort of security force had to be present to oversee crowd safety.¹⁴⁵ Yet the question of which corps was responsible for maintaining order is a difficult one to answer. References to policing at these events are rare and even when mentioned it is often impossible to identify with any precision the unit of soldiers who performed this service because of the ambiguity of the vocabulary used in the sources; the generic *milites* ('soldiers') is found most frequently. Yet, to Roman ears, this term undoubtedly designated the most visible and concentrated force in Rome, namely the praetorians. Ulpian records that the urban prefect was in charge of security at the games, and this has been interpreted to mean that he used the urban cohorts for this purpose since they were under his command, though it is not certain that this was the case before the third century.¹⁴⁶ In fact, under the Julio-Claudians at least, it was the praetorians who attended the spectacles, both the theatre and the games, for the purpose of policing.¹⁴⁷

One of the episodes that is most helpful in illustrating this point is the occasion on which Gaius was murdered (see [Chapter 2](#)). Praetorians were in attendance, but it is not clear how many were there as protection for the emperor and how many for security at the venue itself.¹⁴⁸ Any attempt to resolve this is complicated by the fact

that the event took place on the Palatine where there would have been a cohort on duty anyway. What is most noteworthy here, however, is the absence of the urban cohorts at the time of the murder. If it had been their responsibility to be on watch at venues such as this, then one would expect some mention of them in the aftermath of the assassination. But they do not make an appearance. Instead, it was the German bodyguard that reacted, randomly slaughtering several senators and threatening the crowd.¹⁴⁹ The absence of the urban cohorts, then, reveals that the responsibility for providing security fell to the guard, at least in the first century AD.

Soldiers had been present as spectators at these events in the late republic but under Augustus a formal separation between soldiers and populace was introduced.¹⁵⁰ It is not clear, however, whether this division refers to the seating arrangements for the audience (i.e. soldiers seated apart from the rest of the crowd) or, given the use of the praetorians as security, to a command post being established for those there to maintain order. Post-Augustan evidence points to the latter; the presence of soldiers – initially as the imperial bodyguard, later developing into a security detail – necessitated the creation of a method of physically separating the audience from the praetorians.¹⁵¹ The theatre in particular was a place where violent activity often broke out and the presence of soldiers must have been commonplace.¹⁵² In fact, Valerius Maximus referred to the theatre as a military camp in the city (*urbana castra*), indicating that soldiers were highly visible.¹⁵³ Moreover, in AD 15, there was an increase in violence in the theatre and on one occasion, members of the audience were killed as well as praetorians and a centurion; a tribune of the guard was injured trying to keep order and stop any further attacks on the magistrates present.¹⁵⁴ It is clear from this incident that praetorians were there to take part in the policing of the theatre, since by then security at these venues was one of their administrative duties.¹⁵⁵ In the reign of Nero, in fact, the praetorians normally on duty at the theatre were dismissed; the reason ostensibly was to provide greater freedom for the audience and to stop corruption of those soldiers working there.¹⁵⁶ The experiment failed, however, because of fights between those supporting different actors, and the cohort was returned within the year.¹⁵⁷

Nero was known for his love of spectacle and the guard was a regular presence when he performed. In AD 59, a praetorian cohort along with officers and prefect were present when Nero debuted at the

‘youth games’ in Rome.¹⁵⁸ It is difficult to tell whether the soldiers were there as the personal bodyguard of the emperor, as security to maintain order during the entertainment, as part of the audience, or maybe even all of these; they apparently were not seated, however, which suggests that they were policing the crowd.¹⁵⁹ Five years later, at Nero’s public debut in Naples, praetorians again were in attendance. Once more, it is not entirely clear whether they were there for security or as spectators, but their presence is highlighted: ‘[The theatre at Naples] was filled with citizens as well as with people from the surrounding area drawn by the spectacle; also in attendance were those who accompanied the emperor out of respect or for various practical purposes, even maniples of soldiers.’¹⁶⁰ Given the description, it is likely that the soldiers were there as security for the event and, indeed, that there was a great number of them, sufficient to be noteworthy.¹⁶¹ Nero was intending to leave for Greece after his debut and so may have had a greater number of praetorians with him than would be usual. In fact, one of the main reasons for his trip to Greece was to participate in the contests and it is not surprising to find the guard acting as security at such performances there. For example, during the tour, no one apparently was allowed to leave the theatre while Nero was performing.¹⁶² Indeed, sometimes the guard is seen to be doing more than simple crowd management. At the Neronia of AD 65, praetorians were not only patrolling the seats but were also ensuring the attention of the crowd, punishing those who seemed to be interrupting the applause; in addition, the soldiers seconded the request of the audience that Nero sing and their prefects, followed by tribunes, carried his lyre for him.¹⁶³ Watching for disruptions during performances had been one of its responsibilities from early on; in Gaius’ reign, a centurion was used to discipline a knight who had interrupted a favourite actor.¹⁶⁴ Security clearly had a wide remit.

A major concern for emperors at these events was the opportunity for the audience to voice opposition to imperial policies. The gathering of such a large crowd provided a means of communication between the ruler and the people and allowed him to display the power of his empire.¹⁶⁵ At the same time, it allowed the people to demonstrate against the emperor or to make requests of him, and in a more open manner than might otherwise have been possible. The *princeps* could not afford to ignore such groups.¹⁶⁶ In fact, protests did occur over issues of concern for the plebs, for example, the high price of grain under Tiberius and an increase in taxes under Gaius.¹⁶⁷ The audience was not afraid to let its feelings be known at times like these:

in the midst of civil war in AD 196, the people protested at the races against the prolonged fighting, demanding to know when there would be an end to their suffering.¹⁶⁸ On the other hand, good emperors are shown granting the requests of the crowd, as with Titus and Trajan.¹⁶⁹ But one of the main reasons for the presence of soldiers at events like gladiatorial contests or the theatre must have been concern over limiting dissension to peaceful displays and stopping matters from getting out of hand.¹⁷⁰ In connection with this, there is the use of praetorians, including some undercover, to spy on those in attendance at these venues. For example, under Nero, men were present at the theatre to note who was there and what their expressions revealed.¹⁷¹ While specific examples like this are rare, given the nature of the principate such activity must have been commonplace. The passage from Epictetus already mentioned illustrates the sort of role these men may have played: 'A soldier in private garb sits down next to you and starts to denounce the emperor. Then, because you have a kind of pledge from him of his good faith since he began the abuse, you yourself say what you think, and are immediately carted off to prison.'¹⁷² In fact, this may have been a primary motivation for using the guard, given its role in such activity elsewhere.

Of interest is the personal involvement of the praetorians in some of these contests. A good example is the *naumachia* ('naval fight') staged by Claudius in AD 52 at the Fucine Lake, in which praetorians were used to surround the criminals taking part; it fell to the guard to launch missiles at the combatants as well as to ensure that none of them escaped.¹⁷³ It was under Claudius as well that members of the guard, including tribunes and their prefect, took part in beast hunts.¹⁷⁴ The reason for their participation is not given in the sources.¹⁷⁵ But such a display of military prowess provided yet another demonstration of the power of the imperial bodyguard, and at the same time furnished an opportunity for individual guard members to gain honour in a public exhibition.¹⁷⁶ An appearance in the arena may have been seen as a quasi-military exercise, like the parades of the praetorians which the emperors held for the public, but in this instance the contest in the arena replaced combat in the field. It should not be viewed as a way of debasing or humiliating the soldiers, since even men of high standing had been involved as hunters and as charioteers in the reign of Augustus.¹⁷⁷ It has been noted that 'what attracted [senators and knights] was the opportunity to display their military prowess, their courage and their skill, plus the desire for victory, and the shouts of the crowd', and no doubt the same could be

said of the guard.¹⁷⁸

While the praetorians were being employed as security at these venues, the urban cohorts were not idle. Given the large numbers of people attending the events, there was a need for policing to protect against theft and vandalism; in fact, Augustus himself is recorded to have been concerned about the security of the streets while events were taking place.¹⁷⁹ Members of the urban cohorts most likely were used for this task, since patrolling Rome seems to have been one of their regular duties.¹⁸⁰ Arranged in three (and later four) cohorts, the strength of this unit is uncertain, but it has been estimated that there would have been roughly 1,500 men in total in the first century AD.¹⁸¹ They seem to have had a wide range of responsibilities, mostly associated with looking after order in Rome and its environs, though occasionally venturing further afield.¹⁸² It would have fallen to this unit, for example, in Gaius' reign, to disperse the crowd that had assembled at the circus during the night to procure free tickets for the next day's events and who were said to be disrupting the emperor's sleep.¹⁸³ Similarly the same unit likely was used by the same emperor to quiet the neighbourhood where the games were to take place in order to prevent his horse, Incitatus, from being disturbed.¹⁸⁴ These cohorts were under the command of the urban prefect, chosen from the ranks of the senators, the only prefecture that was not equestrian.¹⁸⁵ The responsibilities of the urban cohorts, then, precludes them from both policing the city and providing security at the games at the same time; on the other hand, the larger number of praetorians meant that they could be present at the various venues and still fulfil their other duties. Furthermore, the use of the guard for security at these events, even when the emperor himself was not present, reinforced in the audience the feeling that they were enjoying his generosity. The additional need for the emperor to have access to information regarding the mood of the populace at the theatre and the games may also have been a factor in the use of his personal guard as police there.

Fighting fires

The problem of fires in ancient Rome had vexed its citizens for centuries. Under the republic, there was no formal system of fire-fighting in place despite the fact that fire was such a common occurrence.¹⁸⁶ Plutarch records that in the first century BC Marcus Licinius Crassus formed his own contingent of slaves and purchased buildings which were on fire or near the scene of a fire; there is,

however, no mention of this group actually fighting the flames – they simply were looking to offer a cheap price to the householder whose property was ablaze or was threatened.¹⁸⁷ It took the establishment of the principate before a permanent fire-fighting corps could be created, for the emperor was unwilling to allow any other individual to usurp this responsibility; it has been argued that ‘once it had become obvious that the security of Rome and the security of the Princeps were synonymous, action was swift’.¹⁸⁸

Even so, it was only in AD 6 that Augustus finally incorporated the *vigiles*, a corps composed of freedmen, as a permanent and active firefighting force.¹⁸⁹ The decision not to use freeborn men in this unit was a result of several factors, but primarily it was an attempt by Augustus to distinguish the *vigiles* as a non-military group.¹⁹⁰ On the problem of how to classify this unit, there is little agreement among scholars.¹⁹¹ It is true that the *vigiles* were organized on a paramilitary basis, in cohorts and centuries, and had officers drawn from other corps; it is this which seems to be the cause of the difficulty.¹⁹² The only ancient source that refers to them as soldiers is Ulpian.¹⁹³ On the other hand, their rate of pay was considerably less than the other city cohorts, or indeed the legionaries initially.¹⁹⁴ It is revealing as well that the *vigiles* were not singled out in the list of those units receiving a legacy from Augustus in AD 14 nor were they mentioned in Tacitus’ list of troops in Rome in AD 23.¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, their period of service was considerably different from legionaries, at only six years, with few veterans attested in the epigraphic record.¹⁹⁶ Finally, there is no evidence of them fighting in the field, which would seem to be a requirement of any military force.¹⁹⁷ In fact, much of the argument concerning the military status of the *vigiles* is derived from careers of the officers, which are not representative.¹⁹⁸ The *lex Visellia* of AD 24, however, granted citizenship to those who had served in the *vigiles* for six years (later reduced to three years) and it is true that, after becoming citizens, they could advance through the ranks in the military, should they wish.¹⁹⁹ Nevertheless that they were based in Rome, under the command of a prefect, meant that they could have a political aspect, given their numbers. Like his praetorian counterpart, the *praefectus vigilum* was chosen from the equestrian order. Most of these men had a combination of military and administrative experience; appointed by the emperor, they were equivalent in status to the prefect of the grain supply.²⁰⁰ The duties of the prefect soon went beyond firefighting, however; in particular, he was responsible for dealing with certain minor judicial matters, which also has caused

some misunderstanding of the unit itself.²⁰¹

The *vigiles* were divided into seven cohorts, each commanded by a tribune, with seven centuries per cohort. The number of cohorts was dictated by the divisions of the city; every cohort of *vigiles* was responsible for two of Rome's 14 regions, with each region having its own watch-house.²⁰² The total number of *vigiles* initially seems to have been around 4,000.²⁰³ The large number attests to the difficulty of controlling fire in Rome; estimates put the number at up to 100 per day.²⁰⁴ It has been pointed out that 'more than any other fire brigade, the *Vigiles* used ample manpower to compensate for the simplicity of the equipment'.²⁰⁵ It is often assumed by modern scholars that the *vigiles* were engaged not only in fighting fires but also in policing the city at night.²⁰⁶ But the evidence does not support this hypothesis and it is clear that the night patrols were used for fire prevention rather than for maintaining order.²⁰⁷

It may have been the sheer number of fires, along with the availability of the praetorians in the city, that meant they became involved in tackling blazes from early in their history. Under Augustus, there is evidence for members of the guard even fighting fires at Ostia where citizens set up an inscription to honour a praetorian soldier who had died in such circumstances.²⁰⁸ On at least one other occasion we know that cohorts were sent there from Rome when the emperor, this time Tiberius, saw a red glow in the sky.²⁰⁹ In fact it was the fear of fire in Ostia as well as the inefficiency of sending men from Rome that finally prompted Claudius to establish a force, probably a cohort of *vigiles*, at the port permanently for the purpose of preventing outbreaks.²¹⁰

In Rome itself, the guard was involved in fighting most of the major fires which occurred early in the empire. In the reign of Tiberius, Livia was present at a fire near the Temple of Vesta, encouraging both the citizens and the soldiers (here praetorians) to work harder in their efforts. She apparently had done the same sort of thing under Augustus.²¹¹ Drusus, Tiberius' son, also was accompanied by soldiers from the guard when he went to provide assistance at a blaze in AD 15, though the report is rather uncomplimentary.²¹² The praetorians must have been present at the fire of AD 22 during which the Theatre of Pompey was destroyed; after their prefect had been praised by the emperor for his efforts, the senate granted Sejanus a statue in the theatre in recognition of his actions in helping to contain the flames.²¹³ Occasionally, emperors themselves are recorded as

being present at the fires, no doubt accompanied by the guard. Gaius, for example, is said to have helped extinguish a blaze and to have been aided in this by soldiers, most likely his praetorian escort.²¹⁴ A group of soldiers also accompanied Claudius to a fire at which he stayed for two days.²¹⁵

Perhaps the best-known conflagration in the imperial period is that of AD 64, during the reign of Nero. In the accounts of this fire, the role of the praetorians is not defined clearly, but they must have been present. The sheer size of the blaze would have made their assistance necessary: 'Though Rome was regularly subject to fires as a consequence of overcrowding, timber construction, and inadequate fire-fighting apparatus, there was nothing routine about this blaze. It broke out in the early hours of 19 July and lasted for six days, only to be renewed for a further three days: it effectively levelled three of the fourteen regions ... leaving only four untouched.'²¹⁶ Yet, there is little recorded in the sources about the attempts made to fight the fire. Dio hints at a somewhat malevolent involvement of 'soldiers': 'Indeed many houses were destroyed because they lacked anyone to save them while many others were set on fire besides by those who had come to help; for the soldiers, both the others and the night-watch looking for plunder, not only did not extinguish the fires but also started others.'²¹⁷ 'Soldiers' here must indicate members of the guard in addition to the *vigiles*. But whether the purpose of these men was as sinister as had been thought has been questioned recently. From the report in Tacitus, it is clear that someone was trying to combat the fire, for he says the fire 'advanced faster in its evil pace than the remedies'.²¹⁸ What the units seem to have been doing, then, was creating a firebreak to stop the spread of the blaze.²¹⁹ The fact that the 'counter-fires' were started on the property of the praetorian prefect Tigellinus is presented as further evidence that this was an attempt to stop the advance; as former commander of the *vigiles*, he would have had experience of how to handle problem fires.²²⁰ The efforts of the *vigiles* and the guard (and probably also of the urban cohorts) to fight the fire, then, has been misrepresented by anti-Neronian sources which portrayed the emperor as the cause of the disaster.²²¹ The rumour that Nero had started the fire himself emerged in that same year and is recorded by the elder Pliny, Suetonius and Tacitus among others.²²² Thus, what seems at first to be inhibition of the firefighting process – preventing people from trying to save their property and setting new fires in the area – in fact may have been the only remedy available to fight such a large blaze. After the conflagration had

finally been extinguished, it is recorded that Nero made an effort to ensure that another fire of such proportions would not occur.²²³

It is interesting that accounts of fires after the Julio-Claudians are rare in the sources and there is little information on imperial intervention. One of the few examples occurs under Commodus, when a fire spread throughout much of the city once again. The emperor is said to have come into the city from the outskirts and encouraged those fighting the fire.²²⁴ Dio records that both civilians and soldiers were involved in battling the blaze; as seen from the fire of 64, there was a need for all who could take part to do so in these cases, and the praetorians no doubt played a large role in assisting the *vigiles* once again.

Given the interests of the sources, they provide little information about fires. It is not surprising, then, that the examples which are recorded in the sources are only those of the greatest significance.²²⁵ The presence of the praetorian guard at many of these fires, however, does not necessarily seem to be related to the task of protecting the emperor and therefore an additional reason for their attendance must be sought. It can only be to assist in the firefighting efforts, a practical use of such a large body of soldiers located close to the city. Furthermore, the emperor was responsible for the welfare of the state, and the presence of his personal armed force would remind the citizens of Rome that he was looking after them.²²⁶

The *vigiles* rarely played a role in politics in the city, though their numbers were considerable.²²⁷ But on one occasion in particular they had a major role: the removal of Tiberius' praetorian prefect, Sejanus. Unfortunately, most of what we know about the prefect comes from hostile sources; only Velleius Paterculus, writing before Sejanus' demise, has anything praiseworthy to say about him.²²⁸ This negative bias, along with the lacuna in Tacitus for much of the years AD 30–31, makes it difficult to determine what exactly happened in the last years of Sejanus' life.²²⁹ It is clear that when Tiberius retired to Capri in AD 26 Sejanus took on administrative responsibilities he had not had previously and, in particular, acted as the emperor's 'eyes and ears' in Rome.²³⁰ But he was merely one of Tiberius' many advisors and it is important to separate fact from fiction here, as far as is possible.²³¹ It is true that Sejanus had control of a sizeable force of soldiers in the city, but the aspirations that have been attributed to him, especially his pursuit of imperial power, is a misinterpretation of the activities that brought him into the political arena and which were later

exploited by anti-Tiberian propaganda. The nature of our sources means that it is impossible to determine what, in fact, went on in AD 30–31.²³²

The suspicion of a plot, however, brought about Sejanus' removal from the prefecture and his execution on the orders of the emperor. He was arrested at a senate meeting held on the morning of 18 October; at a second meeting later in the day, when it was clear that neither the people nor the guard were going to protest, the senate condemned him to death and he was executed immediately.²³³ The sudden fall from favour has captured both the ancient and modern imagination, but it must be said that there is no way of knowing, from the extant sources, the reason for Sejanus' demise.²³⁴ It is possible that some in Rome felt that, with the commander of the guard having so much administrative control in the city, a dangerous situation had been created, especially with the emperor away from, and the troops housed in, the capital. Whether Sejanus would ever have used the praetorians against the emperor was not important; it was the perception that he could have, both by Tiberius and others, that made his removal necessary. But any conjecture about the motives for his elimination must remain speculative.²³⁵

The way in which Sejanus was removed raises several issues. That Tiberius felt compelled to act cautiously can be attributed to the great number of troops in the city under the prefect's command and the emperor's uncertainty as to where their loyalty would lie in the circumstances. But what is difficult to ascertain is why Sejanus so easily allowed Macro to take command of the praetorians who were at the senate meeting, and indeed why the praetorians were there at all. Most scholars have assumed that the soldiers were attending the senate with their commander but the reason for this is not clear: as prefect he may have had a few soldiers with him as escort, but the main reason why the guard attended senate meetings – as protection for the emperor (and no doubt as a reminder of his power) – does not apply here, since Tiberius was not in attendance.²³⁶ Furthermore, Dio records that Macro replaced the guard on duty there with members of the *vigiles*, but this only complicates matters.²³⁷ Why did the praetorians so easily acquiesce, especially to be replaced by a unit that was clearly considered inferior in the hierarchy of the city units? Perhaps strict discipline would allow them to do nothing else. But it could be Macro's position that holds the key.

Various theories have been offered by way of explanation for his

appointment to the prefecture of the guard.²³⁸ As a former prefect of the *vigiles*, Macro clearly had been associated with the imperial household for some time.²³⁹ It is possible, however, that it was his marriage to Ennia Thrasylla, the granddaughter of the astrologer Thrasyllus who was with the emperor on Capri, that had brought him into close contact with Tiberius at this particular time.²⁴⁰ Furthermore, that he was trusted by Tiberius for what was an extremely sensitive mission suggests that he had been on the island in the period immediately prior to the removal of Sejanus. One possibility is that Macro had been appointed interim praetorian prefect when Sejanus became consul at the start of AD 31; this argument is based on the belief that holding both offices concurrently was not possible, but there is no evidence to suggest that this was the case.²⁴¹ But other suggestions – that there had been a power struggle between the two men or that Macro had been placed in charge only of those cohorts on Capri by Sejanus – also have been proposed.²⁴² The idea of a power struggle – dating to long before AD 31 and exploited by Tiberius – ignores the fact that the prefect believed Macro on the morning of 18 October. If there had been any discord between them, it is doubtful whether Sejanus would have trusted him. A sharing of power is a possible scenario, though the idea of a subordinate prefect (which Macro would have been on Capri) does not explain the facility with which he took over in the capital.

Nevertheless, it is clear that Macro was able to command authority on that day and the most logical interpretation is that this resulted from a prior association with members of the guard – and the *vigiles*. Moreover, the fact that he continued as sole prefect after the fall of Sejanus indicates that Tiberius had no doubts about his loyalty, or his ability to control the unit.²⁴³ This is especially significant, given that it is likely that the relationship between the praetorians and their emperor was somewhat uneasy in the immediate aftermath. In fact, Dio records that the guard went on a rampage after the execution of their commander; he attributes this action partly to the annoyance of the praetorians at having been replaced by the *vigiles*.²⁴⁴ And there is further evidence of this anxiety. In AD 32, Tiberius reacted quite irately to a suggestion by Junius Gallio that the guard be allowed to sit in the rows of the theatre reserved for the *equites*. Gallio was accused of trying to subvert the discipline of the guard, expelled from the senate and exiled, later to be returned and kept under arrest, in this case, watched over by magistrates.²⁴⁵ The emperor obviously was concerned that the praetorians remain loyal to him alone.



The wide range of duties that the praetorians undertook belie the interpretation of them only as the imperial bodyguard. That such a large number of soldiers was present in the capital meant that they could be used in a variety of ways to help the emperor and often also the citizens; there was, however, a sinister side to their role when the security of the emperor or the state was at risk.²⁴⁶ The literary sources provide many examples of these tasks in the first century AD; by the second century, however, it is likely that the guard had been integrated so well into the fabric of the city that specific comment was not needed as to their involvement in such activities as discussed above, though the dearth of sources for the later period makes any firm conclusions impossible. Yet that Augustus saw the potential in this unit beyond simply his own security and that it continued to function as a useful tool for subsequent emperors is a testimony to the foresight of the first *princeps*.

CONCLUSION

The praetorian guard was an elite military force, in existence for over 300 years. Adapted from a republican institution by Augustus, it was in essence the personal army of the emperor, and, within a very short time, was responsible also for specialized military tasks and for various administrative duties. This development occurred primarily because of the relationship between the praetorians and the emperor, who saw that such a large number of men in Rome, answering only to himself, could be useful, both for his own benefit and for the city. Not only would they assist in the management of the capital but they would also serve as a constant reminder of the armed force that he had supporting him. It is, therefore, a mistake to consider the praetorians as simply the *bodyguard* of the emperor. From the very beginning, they played a much larger role and had a far greater impact on life in Rome because of their close affiliation with the machinery of state.

In the late stages of the republic, there first appeared a unit that is referred to as a praetorian cohort, whose purpose was to provide protection for the commander in the field. Provincial governors (as military commanders of their provinces) had similar units, but with a broader mandate: to provide administrative assistance as well as personal protection. This model of cohort is illustrated by the observations of Cicero, in his letters and in his speech against Verres, where the praetorians are seen to be involved primarily in a judicial capacity. It is not known what other administrative responsibilities these soldiers might have had, but they appear to be functioning as much more than a military unit. The civil wars of the mid-first century BC saw the emergence of praetorian cohorts for individuals who used these soldiers for their own personal gains, rather than for state business, that is, for intimidation as well as protection. It was undoubtedly with such precedents in mind that Augustus formed his own personal army, the imperial praetorian guard, from those soldiers of the republican praetorian cohorts not discharged after Actium.

The date for the establishment of the guard likely was 27 BC, at a time when Augustus was beginning to strengthen his authority. From the very beginning, the praetorians formed a privileged unit with a

higher rate of pay and a shorter term of service than the average legionary. Organized into nine cohorts of 1,000 men each, they initially were dispersed throughout the city and nearby areas in an attempt to avoid the appearance of having so many armed men in the capital. Since this was the first time that soldiers had been stationed in Rome, Augustus was careful not to offend the citizens by clearly advertising how he had come to power and was maintaining his principate. In reality, however, the praetorians increasingly would have been visible to those in the city because of their growing involvement in its administration and, before long, all of the cohorts were brought into the capital to facilitate the coordination of their duties.

The organization of the guard did not change much throughout its history; the original arrangement by Augustus needed little improvement. Under Tiberius, however, one of the most important changes occurred when he brought all of the cohorts together into a single camp, the *Castra Praetoria*. The establishment of a permanent military base for the praetorians marked an unmistakable change from the years of Augustus. Now the basis of imperial power was evident to all. The reason for the move is given by Tacitus: there had been a problem with discipline, and having all the soldiers together would allow for better control. But there was probably another reason not recorded in the sources: the expanded use of the praetorians in a variety of tasks, primarily in Rome, which went well beyond providing security for the emperor and his family. Having all the soldiers together would allow for better use of the manpower of the guard, since assignments could be coordinated more easily. Yet it would have been obvious to those in the capital that a change had occurred, since the camp dominated the heights north of Rome and its message could not have been more obvious: the fortress provided a clear manifestation of imperial power and it was there to stay.

Around the time of the construction of the camp, the number of cohorts was increased from nine to 12. The date of this change is not recorded in the literary sources, but epigraphic evidence shows that it occurred during the reign of Tiberius and it is likely that it happened in conjunction with the building of the *Castra Praetoria*. The greater number of soldiers would allow for increased efficiency in performing the various responsibilities which the guard now had. Moreover, the additional forces would also provide a stronger show of military support for the emperor at a time when Tiberius was becoming

increasingly concerned for his safety. Although the numbers fluctuated slightly in the course of the first century AD, in particular in connection with the civil war of AD 69, by the end of the century, the cohorts were set at ten, with an effective of 1,000 each. In addition, recruitment to the guard widened slowly from Italy to the most Romanized provinces as the empire matured; it was only with the wholesale change wrought by Severus that this system would change dramatically, and opportunities given to all soldiers to become part of this privileged unit.

That the praetorians occasionally became caught up in the political life in Rome should surprise no one. Their duties placed both the officers and the regular soldiers in close proximity to the centre of power and they obviously took an interest in the affairs of state. Perhaps the most discernible illustration of this involvement in politics was during transitions of power. The grant of sizeable donatives to the guard at such times provides the strongest evidence of a tacit understanding that the soldiers had to be well rewarded for their acceptance of the new regime. When the praetorians took the initiative in political affairs, however, it was invariably the officers and the prefects who were at the forefront. Their close association with the emperor, and thus with the affairs of state, and the greater possibility of reward, encouraged some to take the risk of conspiring against the regime. On the other hand, the average soldier probably remained ambivalent for the most part about the various machinations of power, as long as his needs were looked after. The praetorians on the whole were pragmatic about their relationship with the emperor, and realized that they stood to gain little by challenging the status quo. Although not usually directly involved in conspiracies, the rank and file generally fared well: if the conspiracy failed, they were rewarded for their loyalty; if it succeeded, they would be offered incentives to follow the new emperor. Despite their numbers, it was not the main body of soldiers that represented the clearest danger to the emperor, but rather those men whom he himself had placed in a position of trust. Yet, in AD 193, the entire unit was cashiered because of the actions of a few, who had decided quite rashly to murder the emperor. Expecting to be rewarded by the new *princeps*, as had happened in the past, they could not have anticipated that the empire would become embroiled in a civil war in which they were one of the first casualties. And so, after 200 years, the praetorians were no longer an elite force but rather just another part of the army.

Modern views of the imperial praetorian guard have focused most often on its role as the bodyguard of the emperor. But a closer examination of the various tasks which these troops performed reveals that they were much more than that. These other responsibilities have often been overlooked, but they provide a more comprehensive understanding of the role of the guard in the state. The use of the praetorians as a specialized military force was an extension of its role to ensure the safety of the emperor and, in connection with that duty, to provide assistance when required for the security of the state. The assignments were varied, but the guard often was sent only when previous attempts to find other solutions to a serious problem had failed. In each instance, the security of the emperor could have been compromised had the situation not been resolved. The guard was especially employed in cases where there was a need for covert action or for additional security. Often such sensitive tasks were assigned to a special branch of praetorians known as the *speculatores*. There is little specific information about this unit, however, because of the nature of its activities. But its very presence betrays the vulnerability of a regime based on maintaining control through armed force, intimidation and assassination.

Perhaps the most sinister of the duties assigned to the guard was the confinement, and often the execution, of those whom the emperor considered a risk. Generally these people came from the nobility and most cases are political in nature. There are numerous examples of the use of praetorians to detain individuals who simply were thought to be a threat and those who actually had been charged and were waiting to be tried. In several instances, the intimidating presence of the soldiers was enough to force the individual to commit suicide. Such an act removed the responsibility from the emperor and allowed him to claim that he would have interceded on behalf of the accused and been lenient towards him if only he had not killed himself. Members of the imperial family also were spied upon by those guardsmen who were assigned to them, ostensibly for protection and prestige, but who were reporting back to their superiors the conversations and events which they witnessed. The praetorians in these cases served both as a sign of honour, granted by the emperor, and as a means of control. Whether this was something that happened routinely with all who were provided with a contingent of guards is not certain, but it is possible that one of the principal duties for those soldiers assigned to family members was to keep apprised of their activities. The reason for the choice of the praetorian guard for such a

task was that it owed its allegiance to the emperor alone and could be relied upon to act in his best interests. In fact, this reliability is seen in particular in the executions of members of the imperial family; there is seldom any hesitation to obey the orders of the emperor, despite the unpleasantness of the task.

The guard was also employed in routine civil administration in the capital. In fact, Augustus was instrumental in providing a framework that enabled the city of Rome to be managed in a more professional manner, and it is in the context of this reorganization that one should include the duties assigned to the praetorians. In the republican period, the tendency had been to allocate tasks to individuals as the need arose, a very inefficient and piecemeal method of urban management. Augustus created numerous permanent positions, such as the positions of the *curatores* ('managers'), which were filled by men from both the senatorial and equestrian classes, and together these offices formed the basis of a civil service in Rome. Similarly, he realized the benefits that could be gained from making use of his personal army and so assigned a wide variety of tasks in the city to the guard, which, as a military unit, was efficient in handling such administrative responsibilities.

For example, the guard in its early history acted as a security force at the many spectacles held in Rome each year. The potential for disturbances was great at the circus, the arena and especially at the theatre where, on occasion, spectators had been killed. It is only reasonable to assume, therefore, that there would have been some system in place to ensure the protection of the crowd. Soldiers had been providing security at the games from early in the reign of Augustus, and it became the regular practice to have a contingent there to maintain order. The urban cohorts would have been kept busy policing the city during these events; with the majority of citizens in attendance, there needed to be adequate protection against theft and vandalism in the city streets. The assignment of the praetorians to the games, then, provided a practical solution to the problem of maintaining control among the crowd. It is instructive that, on the one occasion when the soldiers were relieved of this duty at the theatre under Nero, they were back within a very short time because of fights among the spectators.

A major concern of the emperor at these events was the potential for demonstrations against him or his policies. It is clear that the stationing of troops at the games would also ensure that such protests

remained peaceful and would allow the emperor to keep track of the disposition of the crowd. In connection with this responsibility, the more ominous task of spying on individuals at the events was also carried out by guard members, possibly *speculatores*, since the atmosphere at the spectacles – so many people gathered together in one place, without restriction on conversation – encouraged greater freedom of speech than was usually possible. The use of the guard for security at these venues probably evolved from its responsibility to protect the emperor whenever he was in attendance. When he was not there, however, the presence of his personal soldiers would have served as a reminder to those attending that this was an imperial event, presented under the auspices of their *princeps*, and that they were being entertained through his munificence.

Another of the tasks undertaken was helping to fight fires, no doubt because of the number of soldiers available to assist the *vigiles* and, in particular, the inadequacy of ancient firefighting. It is likely that the guard had had a much larger role in the prevention and suppression of fire in Rome and the surrounding areas before the creation of the *vigiles* in AD 6 and continued to function in a similar capacity even after this date. The presence of the imperial soldiers at fires would have reminded the populace that the emperor was looking after them, and this concern was often reinforced by the attendance of the emperors themselves, or members of the imperial family, at these events. It should be remembered that the praetorians were the personal force of the *princeps* and, since he was responsible for the welfare of the state, it is not surprising that they should be called upon to help in these instances. It also was in the emperor's best interest to keep his personal guard in the public eye, both to deter any challenges to his rule and for public relations, and participation in putting out fires would have helped to foster this relationship.

It was only after the civil war of AD 69 that praetorians began to be active in the field. Until then, their forays outside Italy were infrequent to say the least. But by the reign of Domitian, the guard had established itself as a useful force in battle and cohorts accompanied the emperors to the front line throughout the rest of their history. Most notable are the Dacian Wars under Trajan, as depicted on his column, where the guard can be seen playing an active role in the events. After the change brought about by Severus, the new praetorians were battle-hardened and there is much evidence for them in all aspects of combat. Yet as their presence in the field

increased, there is a notable decrease in the evidence for them being involved in the sorts of duties in the capital as they had been earlier. This is not to suggest that the guard did not continue to be part of the administration in Rome, but by the early second century, the unit had become such an integral part of the fabric of the city that little notice was taken of these routine activities. The nature of the literary sources for this later period also means that the praetorians appear less frequently in what few accounts exist. The contrast with their early history could not be more apparent.

In the sources, the praetorian guard is often overshadowed by its commanders, the praetorian prefects. The office was created in 2 BC, possibly because of the increasing difficulty in coordinating the soldiers in their many assignments. It was their close relationship with the emperor, however, that attracted attention, since they were perceived as having inordinate influence in the running of the state. It should be noted that, from the very beginning, it was rare for these prefects to be career military men, even though they were put in charge of the emperor's personal troops. A few had served in some capacity in the army, but more often these appointments were the result of imperial patronage, which meant that they were chosen because of their affiliation with the imperial household rather than for any particular ability to manage such a large military force. The reason is clear: the emperor needed to know that someone he could trust implicitly was in command of his guard, for the greatest danger he could potentially encounter would come from the armed men who were sworn to protect him. In the end, however, the prefects proved ineffective at stopping any conspiracy against the *princeps*, and on occasion, joined in themselves.

The praetorian guard of the Roman empire developed into a multifaceted unit that not only looked after the personal safety of the emperor but also participated in the care of the state. Although the general view has been that these soldiers merely served as the imperial bodyguard, that notion must be revised to encompass the many other tasks that this personal army had. Augustus obviously saw the need to have adequate protection for his principate in the capital, but he also had a rather large number of soldiers that he had to organize after Actium and he must have realized very quickly that such a force needed to be kept occupied if he was to maintain control. As a result, the utilization of the praetorians branched out into other areas of administration where their presence could be advantageous,

both to the emperor and to the city, and where the benevolence of the *princeps* could be promulgated. Yet it must have been obvious to the citizens of Rome, with so many soldiers engaged in a wide variety of tasks, that the principate was, in reality, nothing other than a military dictatorship. The guard existed for the protection of the emperor and, through him, for the benefit of the state, but it always presented a threat of force, and that formed the basis of imperial rule.

NOTES

1. INTRODUCTION

1. 'Elite' here is defined not in the sense of a specialized force (as, say, the SAS) so much as an indication of status; these soldiers were a select group because of their background rather than their ability.

2. As noted by Purcell, 'If there was a "revolution" in the way Augustus ran Rome, it was in making available to the relevant magistrates a larger and better organised body of manpower than had been available before ... it was in the imposition on Rome of military units ... the three *cohortes urbanae*, associated with the city prefect, and the *cohortes praetoriae* responsible directly to the *princeps* ... that the revolution was really effected. The sources for the history of the early Empire time and again display these soldiers as the principal agents of state authority.' See N. Purcell, 'Rome and its development under Augustus and his successors', in A. Bowman et al (eds), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. X (Cambridge, 1996), p 793.

3. Such a progression parallels to a certain extent the increased administrative power that the position of praetorian prefect gained in the first century AD and beyond. This study will not examine the prefects in any depth; on these commanders see M. Absil, *Les Préfets du Prétoire d'Auguste à Commode* (Paris, 1997), which discusses them in some detail; for those after Commodus see L.L. Howe, *The Praetorian Prefects from Commodus to Diocletian* (Rome, 1966). The lack of recent material in English will be addressed by Sandra Ottley, who is currently working on a monograph that will examine the prefects of the first century in particular.

4. As noted by Dio 53.11.5, 'Right away, so it seems, for those men who would serve as his bodyguard, [Augustus] obtained by vote double the pay that was given to the other soldiers, in order that he might have a guard that was devoted to him. In this way, in all truth, did he eagerly desire to settle the monarchy.' Cf. J.B. Campbell, *The Roman Army 31 BC – AD 337: A Sourcebook* (London, 1994), p 183: 'In Dio's view the maintenance of the privileged praetorian guard and the fact that the provinces controlled directly by Augustus contained most of the troops, demonstrated the dichotomy between appearance and reality in imperial politics, since real power depended on control of the army.'

5. In these duties, they supplemented the other two city units – the

urban cohorts and the *vigiles* – both of which are discussed in Chapter 4.

6. These sorts of tasks will not be covered in this work, since the examples are too few to provide evidence that they were regular duties rather than exceptional. For example, soldiers from the guard were sent by Nero to find the source of the Nile and to map the area; the expedition was also on a reconnaissance mission, however. See Seneca, *NQ* 6.8.3–4; Pliny the Elder, *NH* 6.181–6; 12.19. On construction projects, see Josephus, *AJ* 19.257 (stables for Gaius); Suetonius, *Nero* 19.2; cf. also Dio 62.16.1–2 (canal at Corinth). Surveyors and architects were attached to the guard; see R. Sherk, ‘Roman geographical exploration and military maps’, *ANRW* II, 1 (1974), pp 549–50 and G.R. Watson, *The Roman Soldier* (Ithaka, 1969), pp 144, 214, note 497 (the inscription of an architect of the guard dated to the late first century AD, discussed in Chapter 3).

7. As D.B. Saddington (‘Tacitus and the Roman army’, *ANRW* II, 33.5 (1990), p 3496) notes, ‘What needs stressing [about the guard] is its “incidental use”, revealed by chance remarks in Tacitus. The emperors found it particularly useful to use small groups of praetorians, usually under the command of centurions but also of tribunes, to carry out routine or special missions.’

8. On the *frumentarii* see N.J.E. Austin and B. Rankov, *Exploratio: Military and Political Intelligence in the Roman World from the Second Punic War to the Battle of Adrianople* (London, 1995); this unit is discussed briefly in Chapter 4.

9. On this unit see M.P. Speidel, *Riding for Caesar* (London, 1994); they are discussed briefly in Chapter 2.

10. F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World* (London, 1992), p 64. Yet one might argue that such a view has caused the misrepresentation of the guard in modern scholarship.

11. See, for example, J. Matthews, ‘The emperor and his historians’, in J. Marincola (ed), *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography* (London, 2007), pp 290–304. On specific authors see R. Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford, 1958); A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Suetonius* (London, 1983); B. Baldwin, *Suetonius* (Amsterdam, 1983); F. Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (Oxford, 1964); M. Hose, ‘Cassius Dio: a senator and historian in the age of anxiety’, in J. Marincola (ed), *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography* (London, 2007), pp 461–7; H. Sidebottom, ‘Severan historiography: evidence, patterns and arguments’, in S. Swain et al (eds), *Severan Culture* (Cambridge, 2007). I intend to

discuss the sources' attitude to the guard in detail elsewhere in due course.

12. One such exception is the background provided by Tacitus concerning the construction of the *Castra Praetoria*, but even there his focus is more on the character of Tiberius' praetorian prefect Sejanus than on the guard itself; cf. *Annals* 4.2.1; see Chapter 3.

13. For example, the Loeb edition of Dio for the years AD 98–161 (Book VIII in the series) consists of just over 50 pages of Greek, and for the reign of Antoninus Pius not even the epitomator had access to the original text, so there are only a few fragments left.

14. On the problems concerning the *Historia Augusta* see T.D. Barnes, *The Sources of the Historia Augusta* (Brussels, 1978); R. Syme, *Emperors and Biography* (Oxford, 1971).

15. See H. Sidebottom, 'Herodian's historical methods and understanding of history', *ANRW* II.34.4 (1998), pp 2775–2836.

16. Gaius: *RIC* I, #32; Claudius: *RIC* I, #7, #11–12; Nero: *RIC* I, #491; Galba: *RIC* I, #118–22, #126; Vitellius: *RIC* I, #19; Hadrian: *RIC* II, #908–11.

17. M. Durry, *Les Cohortes Prétoriennes* (Paris, 1938); A. Passerini, *Le Coorti Pretorie* (Rome, 1939; reissued 1969). There are only two monographs in English: *The Praetorian Guard* by Boris Rankov (London, 1994) and *Soldiers of Rome: Praetorians and Legionnaires* by Robert Evans (Washington, 1986). The former focuses on technical aspects of the guard; the majority of the book is given over to a discussion of uniform and equipment, with lavish illustrations. The book by Evans (a former commander in the US Army) is intended for the layman, but there are many errors and omissions; the problems are exacerbated by the fact that he was not a classicist, so there is little on the sources. A recent issue of the journal *Ancient Warfare* (5.2, 2011) was dedicated to bodyguards, and the praetorians are the focus of four of the articles. See also R. Cowan, 'The Praetorian Guard: Easy Soldiering in Rome', *Ancient Warfare* 2.1 (2007), pp 30–5. My own entries in the *Encyclopedia of War*, the *Encyclopedia of Conflict in Greece and Rome* and in *Elite Fighting Forces: From the Ancient World to the SAS* should be mentioned as well. In addition, unpublished dissertations by R. Cowan (*Aspects of the Severan Field Army: The Praetorian Guard, Legio II Parthica, and Legionary Vexillations AD 193–238*, University of Glasgow, 2002) and S. Ottley (*The role played by the Praetorian Guard in the events of AD 69 as described by Tacitus in his Historiae*, University of Western Australia, 2009) are available online from the respective

institutions.

18. These include H.D. Stöver, *Die Pratorianer: Kaisermacher, Kaisermörder* (Munich, 1994); A.R. Menéndez Argüín, *Pretorianos* (Madrid, 2006); M. Jallet-Huant, *La Garde Prétorienne dans la Rome Antique* (Paris, 2009); A. Busch, *Militär in Rom: militärische und paramilitärische Einheiten im kaiserzeitlichen Stadtbild* (Wiesbaden, 2011; *non vidi*). An unpublished dissertation (Universidad de Oviedo, 2009) by H. Ceñal Martínez (*La Guardia Pretoriana. Composición, Funciones e Historia*) and a book by L. Luć (*Oddziały Pretorianów Starożytnym Rzymie. Recrutacja, Structura, Organizacja*; Lublin, 2004) also should be mentioned; I have not seen either of these.

19. For example, J. Coulston, “‘Armed and belted men’: the soldiery in imperial Rome’, in J. Coulston and H. Dodge (eds), *Ancient Rome: The Archaeology of the Eternal City* (Oxford, 2000), pp 76–118; Christopher J. Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire: Soldiers, Administration and Public Order* (Oxford, 2012); R.M. Sheldon, *Intelligence Activities in Ancient Rome* (Abingdon, 2005). The volume on the Roman army in the Blackwell Companion series (Oxford, 2007) provides passing references in the essays. An article by Geoffrey Powell (‘The praetorian guard’, *History Today* 18 (1968), pp 858–66) takes the traditional line, with little account of scholarship; the entries in the *Neue Pauly* also are not easily accessible to English readers.

20. Absil, *Les Préfets*.

21. This is true also for older historical works. For example, Gibbon’s *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776), Chapter 5, begins with an examination of the guard, representing the unit as ‘the first symptom and cause of the decline of the Roman empire’.

22. The series was based on Robert Graves’s novels, *I, Claudius* (1934) and *Claudius the God* (1935), both published by Penguin, though these were adapted to suit the needs of television. On the novels see Dorothea Clinton Woodward, ‘Review of Graves “I, Claudius”’, *Classical Journal* 30.6 (1935), pp 366–9; P. Burton, ‘The values of a classical education: satirical elements in Robert Graves’s *Claudius* novels’, *Review of English Studies* 46, no. 182 (1995), pp 191–218. On the TV series see D. Thomas Benediktson, ‘Review of “I, Claudius”, directed by Herbert Wise’, *Classical World* 85.2 (1991), pp 142–3; <http://www.historyinfilm.com/claudius/index.htm> (accessed 14/07/11).

23. Directed by Ridley Scott, the movie came out in 2000. On the

historicity of the film, see the article by Dr Allen Ward at <http://ablemedia.com/ctcweb/showcase/wardgladiator1.html> (accessed 14/07/11).

24. <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/PraetorianGuard> (accessed 14/07/11).

25. <http://www.historum.com/ancient-history/24602-praetorian-guard.html> (accessed 14/07/11).

26. Putting the term 'praetorian guard' into a search engine such as Google produces 472,000 results (accessed 14/07/11). Some of these hits are for commercial products using the name (e.g. a division of Praetorian Wealth Management: <http://praetorianguard.biz/> or Praetorian Disposable Products Ltd: <http://www.disposablegloves.co.uk/>), or for gaming sites, but many pertain to the historical unit.

27. For similar units see J. Black (ed), *Elite Fighting Forces: From the Ancient World to the SAS* (London, 2011).

2. HISTORY

1. Livy 2.20.5: 'The dictator Postumius ... gave the signal to his cohort (*cohorti suae*), a select group that he had around him for protection.' The date is c. 496 BC. It is possible, however, that Livy is guilty of anachronism here; see R.M. Ogilvie, *A Commentary on Livy, Books 1–3* (Oxford, 1965), p 288. All translations from Latin and Greek are my own.

2. Festus on *praetoria*: *praetoria cohors est dicta, quod a praetore non discedebat. Scipio enim Africanus primus fortissimum quemque delegit, qui ab eo in bello non discederent et cetero munere militiae vacarent et sesquiplez stipendium acciperent.*

3. Festus' date is most likely in the late second century AD. See the Festus Lexicon Project website, hosted by University College London: <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/history2/research/festus/indexhtm> (accessed 8/5/12).

4. Livy 29.1.1: 'he had around him three hundred young men, in the flower of youth and noted for their robust strength, but unarmed' (*trecentos iuvenes, florentes aetate et virium robore insignes, inermes circa se habebat*). Cf. Plutarch, *Fabius Maximus* 26.2.

5. The attribution of the innovation to Scipio Aemilianus also is not without difficulty; appointed by the senate as consular commander against the Numantines in 134 BC, he took with him a select group to act as his bodyguard, but the passage describing them makes it clear

that these men were mounted. See Appian, *Hisp.* 84.

6. L. Keppie, 'The praetorian guard before Sejanus', *Athenaeum* 84 (1996), p 102; Durry: *Les Cohortes*, p 70.

7. Appian, *BCiv* 1.100.

8. See Appian, *Hisp.* 84; J. Crook, *Consilium Principis* (Cambridge, 1955), p 25. The term used by Appian is regularly translated as a 'cohort of friends'.

9. Appian, *BCiv.* 1.25. The date is 132 BC.

10. Cf. Sallust, *Jugurtha* 98.1. For further examples, see Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 71.

11. For example, in *Gaius* 19.2, where the *cohors amicorum* is, in fact, distinguished from the guard; *Nero* 5.1; *Galba* 7.1.

12. Crook, *Consilium Principis*, p 25.

13. Sallust, *Catiline* 60.5; see also 61.1 where the term is repeated. As with Livy earlier, it is possible that the use of the term in this context is anachronistic. For information on the Catilinarian conspiracy see T.P. Wiseman, 'The senate and the *populares* 69–60 BC', in J.A. Crook et al (eds), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. IX (Cambridge, 1994), pp 327–67.

14. The term used is *scortorum cohortem praetoriam*; see *In Cat* 2.23. My thanks to Dominic Berry on the date of the publication of these speeches.

15. Caesar, *BG* 1.40: *quod si praeterea nemo sequatur, tamen se cum sola decima legione iturum, de qua non dubitaret, sibi que eam praetoriam cohortem futuram*. See also Caesar, *BG* 1.42.

16. Cf. also L. Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army* (London, 1984), p 153.

17. Other units that functioned as bodyguards in this period are known, however. For example, Caesar had a corps of Spaniards as a guard, which he later dismissed; see Suetonius, *Divus Julius* 86; Appian *BCiv.* 2.109. Others who had similar groups include Marius (Plutarch, *Marius* 43) and Quintus Sertorius, praetor in 82 BC (Appian, *BCiv* 1.112). In addition, Petreius, when fighting as Pompey's legate against Caesar in 49 BC, is said to have had a guard drawn from different sources; among these was a cohort of *caetrati* ('peltasts' – that is, foot soldiers armed with a small shield), to which the adjective 'praetorian' is attached: *praetoria cohorte caetratorum*. See Caesar, *BC* 1.75. That these men were *caetrati* suggests that they were not Roman but local

Spanish troops, used much as the German bodyguard would be in the early imperial period, on which see below.

18. See Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 75. On the other hand, as seen above, Appian uses the term frequently in association with Caesar, even recording at *BCiv* 2.107 that he dismissed the praetorian cohorts that had been his bodyguard during the wars. Yet this is most likely an anachronistic use of the term. It is possible that the 2,000 soldiers attending Caesar when he visited Cicero in 45 BC may indicate that by that time he did have a regular guard, though this is by no means certain. See *Ad Att* 13.52.

19. Examples include II.1.14, II.3.29, II.4.43. In each, the expression used is *cohors praetoria*, usually translated as ‘governor’s staff’. The term is also used in a similar way by several of the poets; see Catullus 10.10, Horace *Sat.* 1.7.23–5, Tibullus 1.3.2.

20. On Verres’ praetorian cohort see T. Corey Brennan, *The Praetorship in the Roman Republic*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 2000), pp 482–95.

21. Cicero, *Ad Q.f.* 1.1.12: ‘Indeed, what about those you have selected to be with you from your household personnel or as essential staff – those that are accustomed to be called the staff of the governor.’ (*quos vero aut ex domesticis convictionibus aut ex necessariis apparitionibus tecum esse voluisti, qui quasi ex cohorte praetoris appellari solent.*) The governor’s staff included ‘humbler members ... such as lictors’, as noted by D.R. Shackleton-Bailey, *Cicero: Epistulae ad Quintum Fratrum et M. Brutum* (Cambridge, 1980), p 150.

22. For example, *Ad Att.* 7.2.3. Here, members of Cicero’s *cohors praetoria* are reported to have witnessed a will. Shackleton-Bailey distinguishes this cohort as a *cohors amicorum praetoria* and notes that it ‘consists of friends and clients’, but the text does not specify that this is a *cohors amicorum*, and there is no reason to assume such. See D.R. Shackleton-Bailey, *Cicero’s Letters to Atticus*, vol. III (Cambridge, 1968), p 285.

23. *Ad Fam.* 15.4.7. The date is 51 BC; it has been noted that this is ‘the general’s bodyguard, enjoying special pay and privileges’. See D.R. Shackleton-Bailey, *Cicero: Epistulae ad Familiares*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1977), p 447.

24. The most succinct summary of this period is provided by Keppie, ‘The praetorian guard’, pp 104–7.

25. Appian, *BCiv* 3.40. These men were enticed to join by a cash grant. Writing in the early second century AD, it is possible that

Appian was influenced by the number of men in the imperial cohorts at that time; see Chapter 3.

26. Appian, *BCiv* 3.42. Donatives in the republic generally were associated with triumphs, at which time the generals rewarded their troops with booty gained from battle. Cf. V. Maxfield, 'Systems of reward in relation to military diplomas', in W. Eck and H. Wolff (eds), *Heer und Integrationspolitik: Die römischen Militärdiplome als historische Quelle* (Köln, 1986), p 28. Octavian's attempt here anticipated the donatives issued to the guard by the emperors in the imperial period; see Chapter 3.

27. Appian, *BCiv* 3.45; cf. also 3.50. For Appian, these men clearly are the equivalent of the imperial guard, for they served as Antony's escort in Rome, guarded his house at night under arms and were given passwords. See also Cicero, *Philippics* 8.8.25, where this praetorian cohort is listed separately from Antony's legions and his cavalry; the date is 43 BC.

28. Cicero, *Ad Fam.* 10.30. These cohorts did not just serve as a guard for the commander, but played an active role in the struggle, according to Galba's account of the battle in his letter to Cicero. See also Appian, *BCiv* 3.66–70. Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army*, pp 115–16 provides a brief summary, with diagram.

29. Cicero, *Ad Fam.* 10.30.4.

30. W.W. How, *Cicero: Select Letters* (Oxford, 1962), p 525.

31. Appian, *BCiv* 4.7.

32. F. Millar, 'Triumvirate and principate', *JRS* 63 (1973), p 59.

33. *RPC* #1651. It should be noted, however, that there is some confusion over the dating of these coins and that they might be as late as Claudius or Nero.

34. Appian, *BCiv* 4.115–16. See also Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army*, p 238, note 23.

35. It may be that the size of this cohort had an influence on the way in which Augustus structured his imperial guard, though Appian also could be guilty of anachronism here. For the problem of the size of individual cohorts of the imperial praetorian guard, see Chapter 3.

36. Appian, *BCiv* 5.3; cf. also 5.59, where the praetorian cohorts thus formed meet again. Of those soldiers who were discharged, some settled at Philippi, forming a new colony (*Iulia Victrix Philippi*). See Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army*, pp 121, 231, and plate 16c. For problems with the dating of the coins on which this theory is

based, however, see S. Kremydi-Sicilianou, 'Victoria Augusta on Macedonian coins: remarks on dating and interpretation', *Tekmeria* 7 (2002), pp 63–82.

37. Appian, *BCiv* 5.24; cf. 5.19–21. Lucius earlier had been forced to get rid of a bodyguard made up of men from M. Antony's colonies; see Appian, *BCiv*. 5.19–20.

38. Plutarch, *Antony* 39.2.

39. See Edward A. Sydenham, *The Coinage of the Roman Republic* (London, 1952), #1212, 1213; Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army*, pp 127, 228, plate 12c.

40. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 76.

41. Suetonius, *Augustus* 14.

42. Plutarch, *Antony* 53.2; Appian, *BCiv* 5.95 (where the number is given as 1,000); Dio 49.33.4.

43. Orosius 6.19.8; his work dates to the early fifth century AD.

44. For example, at Gunugu in Mauretania; cf. Pliny the Elder, *NH* 5.20.

45. Augustus made many changes to the military structure shortly after Actium, most notably the reorganization of the legions in the provinces and their command structure. See K. Gilliver, 'The Augustan reform and the structure of the imperial army', in P. Erdkamp (ed), *A Companion to the Roman Army* (Oxford, 2007), pp 183–200. It may be that the organization of the praetorians can be seen in the same context, but without a clearer chronology it is difficult to know for certain.

46. J.B. Campbell, *The Emperor and the Roman Army* (Oxford, 1984), p 112. The incident in the 40s at which Augustus was attacked at the games mentioned above may also have had an impact since it was clear that Augustus' safety could be compromised.

47. Tacitus: *Annals* 4.5.3: *insideret urbem proprius miles, tres urbanae, novem praetoriae cohortes, Etruria ferme Umbriaque delectae aut vetere Latio et coloniis antiquitus Romanis*. Most translators prefer to understand the cohorts as 'belonging' to the city, most recently A.J. Woodman (trans), *Tacitus: The Annals* (Indianapolis, 2004), and J.C. Yardley (trans), *The Annals: The Reigns of Tiberius, Claudius and Nero* (Oxford, 2008). It seems equally likely, however, given Tacitus' attitude towards the praetorian guard in particular, that the author has chosen the word *proprius* to emphasize the close relationship between the emperor and the city cohorts. On the urban cohorts see

Chapter 4.

48. As Millar notes, this is a 'personal grant of rights from the emperor himself'; see *The Emperor*: p 65. On diplomas see Chapter 3.

49. See Dio 57.3.2; Campbell, *Emperor*, pp 27, 30 (where it is pointed out that in the third century, at least, the oath was considered a 'holy secret'; see Herodian 8.7.4).

50. Dio 56.31–42; Tacitus, *Annals* 1.8.6; Suetonius, *Augustus* 99.2–100.4. It is likely that such displays became a regular part of imperial funerals, of which there are few accounts; for that of Drusilla (in AD 38) see Dio 59.11.2; cf. Suetonius, *Gaius* 24.1–2; for Pertinax (in AD 193) see Dio 75.4–5.6.

51. The most comprehensive work on this group is still H. Bellen, *Die germanische Leibwache der römischen Kaiser des julisch-claudischen Hauses* (Wiesbaden, 1981). See also Speidel: *Riding for Caesar*; R. Sablayrolles, 'La rue, le soldat et le pouvoir: la garnison de Rome de César à Pertinax', *Pallas* 55 (2001), pp 136–7.

52. For the Germans with Caesar, see BG 7.13.1; Speidel, *Riding for Caesar*, pp 12–13.

53. Y. Le Bohec, *The Imperial Roman Army* (London, 1994), p 23.

54. On the Varan disaster see Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome* 2.118.2–119.5; Dio 56.18.4–22.2. For Pannonia see Tacitus, *Annals* 1.24.2. It is interesting that the language used by Tacitus here – *custodes imperatori* – indicates the role that the Germans had ('guard for the commander'), even when their task did not involve the emperor directly as here. On the Pannonian episode see Chapter 4

55. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.58.2.

56. Suetonius, *Galba* 12. On the unit that eventually replaced the *Germani corporis custodes*, the *equites singulares Augusti*, see below.

57. W. Nippel, *Public Order in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge, 1995), p 91; Sablayrolles: 'La rue', p 135.

58. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 10. Passerini had argued, however, that Augustus included the praetorians among those referred to generally as *milites* in the *Res Gestae*; while it is impossible to know whether his audience would make this assumption, it does allow Augustus to mask the significance of the guard. See *Le Coorti*, p 210.

59. Dio 54.6.5.

60. Millar, *The Emperor*, p 61, argues that soldiers accompanied the emperor on all journeys, even within Italy. Yet this is not accepted by

all scholars; see, for example, Campbell, *Emperor*, p 113. For further discussion on this see Chapter 3.

61. For the games see Suetonius, *Augustus* 14; 43.3; 44.1; S. Bingham, 'Security at the games in the early imperial period', *Echoes du Monde Classique* 18 (1999), pp 369–79. For soldiers as guards in the city see Dio 56.23.4; Suetonius, *Augustus* 23; 32.1.

62. There were eight serious fires in the reign of Augustus prior to AD 6 (the date of the introduction of the *vigiles*), seven of which occurred after the formation of the guard. Cf. Paul O. Werner, *De Incendiis Urbis Romae Aetate Imperatorum* (Leipzig, 1906), p 46. On the *vigiles* see Chapter 4.

63. Suetonius, *Augustus* 27.4. G. Gaggero, *Vite dei Dodici Cesari* (Milan, 1990), p 237, n. 9, dates this episode to 43–42 BC.

64. *Augustus* 27.1.

65. P.A. Brunt, 'Princeps and equites', *JRS* 73 (1983), pp 59–60. He queries as well whether the 'establishment of a permanent prefecture was not the culmination of a process in which Augustus had from time to time delegated supreme command to one or more of the tribunes'.

66. Howe argues, however, that the initial function for these men was military; see *Praetorian Prefects*, pp 10, 32. Cf. also Brunt, 'Princeps and equites', p 60; Absil, *Les Préfets*, p 14. Syme, on the other hand, suggests that they were 'military in rank, but political in significance'; see *Tacitus*, p 591. Pliny, *Panegyricus* 67.8, notes that Trajan armed his prefect; this was in case, as emperor, Trajan did not act in the interests of the state. But the evidence is inconclusive as to whether this was standard practice, though Herodian (3.11.2) does suggest that Severus' prefect, Plautianus, carried a sword at his side.

67. On the relationship see, for example, A.E. Hanson, 'Publius Ostorius Scapula: Augustan prefect of Egypt', *ZPE* 47 (1982), p 252. On the issue of patronage in the appointment to the equestrian prefectures, see R.P. Saller, *Personal Patronage in the Early Empire* (Cambridge, 1982), p 49; Millar, *The Emperor*, p 64; A.N. Sherwin-White, 'Procurator Augusti', *PBSR* 15 (1939), p 17. Saller (*Personal Patronage*, p 62) notes that 'it cannot be doubted that praetorian prefects, whose very appointments testified to the emperor's confidence in their loyalty and friendship, were among the most influential figures in imperial circles'.

68. As Hanson has noted: 'the pre-eminence of the praetorian prefecture would have emerged only gradually ... the ordering of the

equestrian career at its highest levels [that is, from prefect of Egypt to praetorian prefect] became fixed only from the reign of Domitian' ('Publius Ostorius Scapula', p 253). On the role of the prefects in general see Absil, *Les Préfets*, pp 55–82; Passerini: *Le Coorti*, pp 207–356. Their juridical responsibilities are discussed briefly in Chapter 3.

69. Dio 55.10.10.

70. K. Wachtel, 'Ostorii Scapulae', *AArchHung* 41 (1989), pp 241–6; M. Christol and S. Demougín, 'Notes de prosopographie équestre II: Gens Ostoria', *ZPE* 57 (1984), pp 171–8 (with family tree, p 177); Hanson, 'Publius Ostorius Scapula', pp 243–53; A.E. Hanson, 'The archive of Isodoros of Psophthis and P. Ostorius Scapula, Praefectus Aegypti', *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 21.1–4 (1987), pp 77–87. It is possible that a marriage between Publius and the daughter of Sallustius Crispus (one of Augustus' ministers) brought the brothers to the attention of the emperor; cf. Hanson: 'Publius Ostorius Scapula', p 247; 'The archive', p 81, n. 11.

71. R. Syme (*The Augustan Aristocracy* (Oxford, 1986), p 301) suggests that he came from Brixia in Transpadane Italy, based on *CIL* 5.4201 (= *ILS* 4902), which records a Lucius Salvius Aper as a magistrate there in 8 BC.

72. See, for example, Brunt, 'Principes and equites', p 60.

73. Contra R. Syme, 'Guard prefects of Trajan and Hadrian', *JRS* 70 (1980), p 64. For example, it is not known whether there were two successors to Scapula and Aper or only one; Seius Strabo alone is attested as praetorian prefect at the death of Augustus in AD 14. See Tacitus, *Annals* 1.7.2. Indeed, there are more examples of single prefects than of pairs in the first three centuries. See Absil, *Les Préfets*, pp 87–95.

74. Cf. 52.24.1–6. In Dio's own lifetime, the example of the praetorian prefect Fulvius Plautianus (whom Dio intensely disliked; see, for example, 76.15) provided the rationale for such a statement.

75. Cf. Brunt: 'Principes and equites', p 60: 'it might have been rather invidious for [Augustus] to choose any particular senators for a commission so closely linked with his own person.' See also V. Rudich, *Political Dissidence under Nero: the Price of Dissimulation* (London, 1993), p 234; Campbell, *Emperor*, p 117. Durry, however, offered the explanation that because Maecenas was an *eques*, Augustus preferred to select his praetorian prefects from that class; see *Les Cohortes*, p 157.

76. The appointment has been connected with the disgrace of Augustus' daughter Julia in the same year, and the elimination of her lovers, but without further comment. See Syme, *Augustan Aristocracy*, p 300; 'Guard prefects', p 64 ('The occasion might excite curiosity: perhaps after the grave crisis in the autumn'). Yet there is no evidence to suggest that this is the case.

77. These men were *equites* and often ex-centurions. The length of tenure for tribunes is not clear, though some men did serve for a lengthy period; see Brunt, 'Princeps and equites', pp 47, 61.

78. Even after the construction of the *Castra Praetoria*, the centre of operations for the guard must have continued to be the palace, for practical reasons; furthermore, there is no evidence of a headquarters building in the camp itself. See Chapter 3.

79. The camp is discussed in Chapter 3, the removal of those considered a threat in Chapter 4.

80. Tacitus, *Annals* 1.5.3–4.

81. The most likely candidates for this task would be members of the *speculatores*, on whom see Chapter 4.

82. Tacitus, *Annals* 6.50.4. There is some suggestion that Macro may have taken an even more active role in Tiberius' death; see Tacitus, *Annals* 6.50.5; Dio 58.28.4. On Macro see below.

83. References to Agrippina refer to Agrippina the Younger unless otherwise specified.

84. Tacitus, *Annals* 12.68.2–3. The similarity of the roles played by the empresses at the deaths of Augustus and Claudius has been assessed by several scholars; see, for example, A.A. Barrett: *Livia* (London, 2004), pp 243–6; L.W. Rutland, 'Women as makers of kings in Tacitus', *CW* 72 (1978), p 28. On Burrus see below.

85. The sources hint that the reason for the delay was as much about the timing as ensuring that all plans were in place; see Tacitus, *Annals* 12.68.3; Suetonius, *Nero* 8. Cf. A.A. Barrett, *Agrippina* (Yale, 1996), p 142.

86. Tacitus, *Annals* 12.69.1: *tunc medio diei tertium ante Idus Octobris, foribus palatii repente diductis, comitante Burro Nero egreditur ad cohortem, quae more militiae excubiis adest. ibi monente praefecto faustis vocibus exceptus inditur lecticae. dubitavisse quosdam ferunt, respectantis rogitantisque ubi Britannicus esset: mox nullo in diversum auctore quae offerebantur secuti sunt.*

87. For a comprehensive discussion of the assassination see A.A.

Barrett, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power* (Yale, 1990), pp 154–171.

88. See Suetonius, *Gaius* 56.1; Dio 59.25.5b. Although scholars generally have accepted the idea of two separate conspiracies in AD 40–41, Barrett (*Caligula*, p 155) argues convincingly for the events to be part of a single plot. A crucial element in the success of any conspiracy is timing; it is unlikely that, given the constraints of time, two plots could have been conceived and then attempted within the few months available after Gaius' return to Rome from Campania.

89. Cf. Dio 59.26.3. This is the first reference to such a need, and it suggests that there had been a problem with vandalism or demonstrations centred around the images. Cf. Barrett, *Caligula*, p 294, note 29.

90. The text of Tacitus' *Annals* is missing for this period, and so we are forced to rely upon Josephus and Dio for the details. It is possible, however, that Josephus made use of the history of Cluvius Rufus, who may have been an eyewitness to the assassination; see Barrett, *Caligula*, pp 168–9; K. Scherberich, 'Josephus und seine Quellen im 19. Buch der Antiquitates Iudaicae (ant. Iud. 19, 1–273)', *Klio* 83 (2001), pp 134–51.

91. For Chaerea's career see S. Demougin, *Prosopographie des Chevaliers Romains Julio-Claudiens* (Rome, 1992), #419. He had been present at the mutiny of the armies on the Rhine in AD 14 as a centurion in one of the legions and is described by Tacitus as a courageous young man; see *Annals* 1.32.2. We know nothing of his career under Tiberius.

92. Josephus, *AJ* 19.21. Cf. also Suetonius, *Gaius* 56.2; Dio 59.29.2; Seneca, *De Cons.* 18.3–4.

93. Josephus, *AJ* 19.41–2.

94. For a discussion of the exact date see David Wardle, 'When did Caligula die?', *AClass* 34 (1991), pp 158–65.

95. Cf. Demougin: *Prosopographie*, #420 (Sabinus); #421 (Lupus); #423 (Papinius). That four tribunes of 12 were involved in the plot reveals the strength of the conspiracy.

96. This lack of detail does not stop modern scholars from assuming the participation of both prefects; see, for example, A. Winterling, *Caligula: A Biography* (trans Deborah Lucas Schneider, Glenn W. Most and Paul Psounis) (London, 2011), pp 174–6; he even notes that the prefects 'were removed from office, but remained unharmed because they had helped to elevate the new emperor to the

throne’.

97. Cf. Josephus *AJ* 19.80–3. See also Barrett, *Caligula*, pp 162–3. Soldiers in the area would have included not only those providing protection for the emperor but also those patrolling the games as well as the cohort on duty at the palace.

98. See Josephus, *AJ* 19.99; Suetonius, *Gaius* 58.

99. In the version given by Suetonius (*Gaius* 58.2), it is Sabinus who asks for the watchword.

100. Cf. Dio 59.30.2. For Asiaticus’ possible involvement in the conspiracy see Barrett, *Caligula*, p 162.

101. Josephus, *AJ* 19.119–26.

102. Josephus, *AJ* 19.191; cf. B. Levick, *Claudius* (London, 1990), pp 37–8; Barrett, *Caligula*, pp 166–7. Though Josephus includes a delay between the murder of Gaius and that of Caesonia, Barrett quite rightly notes that this would have allowed Caesonia to escape and thus to ‘become a focus of resentment and resistance, just as Agrippina and her sons had become in the previous reign’. The execution of the family must have been planned in advance and taken place immediately.

103. Josephus, *AJ* 19.162–5.

104. Josephus, *AJ* 19.214–26; cf. also Suetonius, *Claudius* 10; Dio 60.1–3; Aurelius Victor, *Caes* 3.16. For Alma Tadema’s interpretation of this episode, see Figures 1 and 2.

105. Cf. Levick, *Claudius*, pp 35, 38; Barrett, *Agrippina*, p 72; D. Hurley (ed), *Suetonius, Divus Claudius* (Cambridge, 2001), pp 84–6. Winterling (*Caligula*, pp 174–6) sees a key role for Callistus, one of Gaius’ freedman, in the assassination and choice of Claudius, based on the account in Josephus.

106. The positive depiction of Clemens in Josephus may be the result of the position of Clemens’ son, also Marcus Arrecinus Clemens, who was a prominent senator under the Flavians, as noted by T.P. Wiseman, *Death of an Emperor* (Exeter, 1991), p 30.

107. Suetonius records that Claudius initially had retreated to an annexe called the Hermaeum; he then moved to a balcony, presumably associated with the Hermaeum; see *Claudius* 10.1; Hurley, *Claudius*, pp 95–6; Barrett, *Caligula*, p 173.

108. Josephus, *AJ* 19.253; *BJ* 2.211–12; Suetonius, *Claudius* 10.4; Dio 60.1.4.

109. The amount of the donative to be given by Claudius was either 15,000 sesterces (Suetonius, *Claudius* 10.4) or 20,000 sesterces (Josephus, *AJ* 19.247, where a donative is also promised to the rest of the army). Cf. Levick, *Claudius*, p 32; J. Mottershead (ed), *Suetonius, Claudius* (Bristol, 1986), p 50. On donatives in general see Chapter 3.

110. Suetonius, *Claudius* 10.4: '[Claudius] was the first of the Caesars to have gained the allegiance of the soldiers by means of a bribe' (*primus Caesarum fidem militis etiam praemio pigneratus*). On those who accept this, see, for example, C.H.V. Sutherland, *Roman History and Coinage: 44 BC–AD 69* (Oxford, 1987), p 76, and Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 366.

111. Barrett, *Caligula*, p 175; Hurley, *Claudius*, p 101. In fact, it has been argued that 'by giving them twice as much, Caligula set the precedent that the loyalty of the guard should be bought by their new *imperator*, instead of being rewarded by the old one at his death'. (T.E.J. Wiedemann, 'Tiberius to Nero', in A. Bowman et al (eds), *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. X (Cambridge, 1996), p 222).

112. Campbell, *Emperor*, pp 166–8, points to the 'violent upheavals of the republic' as precedent for such a huge donative but suggests that the Claudian figure may have been 'merely a convenient round sum'. On the pay rate for the guard see Chapter 3.

113. A. Garzetti, *From Tiberius to the Antonines* (London, 1974), p 108.

114. *RIC* I, #7; see Figure 3. The legend reads 'the emperor received'. The figure is usually taken to be a praetorian soldier but *Fides Praetorianorum* has also been suggested; see Sutherland, *Roman History*, pp 76–7, after C.L. Clay, 'Die Münzprägung des Kaisers Nero in Rom und Lugdunum', *NZ* (1982), p 43.

115. *RIC* I, #11–12. The legend reads 'the praetorians received'. As Grant has noted, 'These issues are unique in Roman imperial numismatics and military history. No other emperor, before or after Claudius, blatantly advertised that he owed the praetorians his throne.' See M. Grant, *The Army of the Caesars* (New York, 1974), p 151. Cf. also O. Hekster, 'The Roman army and propaganda', in P. Erdkamp (ed), *A Companion to the Roman Army* (Oxford, 2007), p 351.

116. Cf. Levick, *Claudius*, p 39. Campbell notes that '[t]hey are so unusual, with their clear emphasis on comradely spirit and mutual support of emperor and soldier, that Claudius himself may have been directly responsible for their design. They celebrate an association

between emperor and soldiers that Augustus had been at pains to conceal.' See Campbell, *The Roman Army*, p 185.

117. Dio 60.12.4.

118. Mottershead, *Suetonius, Claudius*, p 50; B. Levick, 'Antiquarian or revolutionary? Claudius Caesar's conception of his principate', *AJPH* 99 (1978), p 95.

119. Josephus, *AJ* 19.269; cf. Dio 60.3.4. See also Suetonius, *Claudius* 11.1, where a further reason for the execution of Chaerea is given, namely that he had advocated the murder of Claudius.

120. Absil points out that it is difficult to know how much of a role the prefects had in the routine administration of the cohorts themselves, arguing that the officers would have looked after their management. See *Les Préfets*, p 64. There is, however, very little evidence on which to draw such a conclusion: direct involvement of the prefects is recorded only in times of crisis, though Tacitus records a rather more 'hands-on' approach for Tiberius' prefect, Sejanus; see *Annals* 4.2.2. On Sejanus as prefect see Chapter 3.

121. For the appointment and Macro's role in Sejanus' fall see Chapter 4.

122. Dio 59.10.6. This is the only mention of the appointment in the sources. Cf. A. Stein, *Die Praefekten von Agypten* (Bern, 1950), p 28.

123. Dio 59.10.6; Suetonius, *Gaius* 26.1; Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 61. The suicides of Macro and Ennia may have been motivated by a desire to retain their property within the family rather than risk it being confiscated by the state; on this see Chapter 4. In fact, Macro was able to bequeath enough money to his hometown of Alba Fucens for an amphitheatre to be constructed; it is the inscription associated with this that reveals his previous appointment to the *vigiles*. Cf. F. de Visscher, 'L'amphithéâtre d'Alba Fucens et son fondateur Q. Naevius Macro, préfet du prétoire de Tibère', *RAL* ser. 8, 12 (1957), pp 39–49; F. de Visscher, 'La carrière et le testament d'un préfet du prétoire de Tibère', *BAB* 43 (1957), pp 176–8.

124. Philo (*Legatio ad Gaium* 52–9) records that Gaius contrived charges against the prefect because, among other things, he was tired of being reminded of the role Macro had played in the succession, in particular in ensuring the loyalty of the praetorians after the death of Tiberius. Cf. Barrett, *Caligula*, p 78.

125. Coincidentally, two other deaths of significance occurred around the time of Macro's demise: those of Tiberius Gemellus, Gaius'

cousin and heir, and Gaius's father-in-law, Marcus Silanus. Cf. Dio 59.8.1; 4–6; Suetonius, *Gaius* 23.3. Whether these three deaths are connected in any way is impossible to determine and any understanding of the events is complicated by the problems with chronology: was the appointment of Macro to the prefecture of Egypt before or after the deaths of Gemellus and Silanus? If evidence had emerged of some sort of arrangement between Gemellus and Silanus (among others), however, it is possible that the prefect would have been implicated.

126. It is not known when a new praetorian prefect was appointed to the post, nor who it was. Despite the assertion of several scholars that it was immediately after Macro's dismissal that the command of the guard reverted to being shared by two men, this is not supported by the sources, for Dio (59.11.2) speaks of only one praetorian prefect at the funeral of Drusilla in AD 38. Contra Barrett, *Caligula*, p 80. By AD 41, there definitely were two prefects, one of whom was Clemens; see Suetonius, *Gaius* 56.1: *praefectorum praetori*; Dio 59.25.8.

127. Tacitus, *Annals* 12.42.2; Dio 60.32.6a. Burrus replaced two prefects, one of which (Lucius Lusius Geta) was given the post of prefect of Egypt, a move which had been used in the past to remove praetorian prefects from Rome. The other (Rufrius Crispinus) reappears in the Pisonian Conspiracy against Nero in AD 65; see Chapter 3.

128. Suetonius, *Claudius* 18.2; Tacitus, *Annals* 12.43.1. Barrett, *Agrippina*, p 121.

129. The timing here is interesting, since the two prefects were able to continue in their positions until AD 51, that is, for three years after the death of Messalina, and two years after Agrippina's marriage to the emperor. It has been suggested that two other prefects had been appointed after the fall of Messalina and before the appointment of Burrus, but there is no evidence for this and it is difficult to understand why a change of prefects at that time would not have elicited a comment in the sources; see B. Levick, *Claudius*, p 74. Scholars often have not considered the time lapse before Agrippina had the prefects dismissed; for example, Rudich, *Political Dissidence*, p 148: 'Upon Messalina's fall, [Crispinus] was dismissed under pressure from Agrippina, who had championed Afranius Burrus.' On the demise of Messalina see Chapter 4.

130. Cf. Levick, *Claudius*, p 74. Agrippina had already arranged that several of the tribunes and centurions would support Nero; see

Tacitus, *Annals* 12.41.2, and cf. Barrett, *Agrippina*, pp 118–21.

131. Evidence for Burrus' career (and association with the imperial family) is found in an inscription from Vasio; see *CIL* 12.5842 (= *ILS* 1321). On this inscription and others associating Burrus with this area in Gaul, see W.C. McDermott, 'Sextus Afranius Burrus', *Latomus* 8 (1949), pp 230–4; Barrett, *Agrippina*, p 122. Tacitus is quite complimentary to Burrus (e.g. *Annals* 12.42.1) and it could be that they both came from the same area; see Syme, *Tacitus*, pp 623–4.

132. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 368, refers to Burrus as 'Agrippina's creature', but that is overstating the situation. McDermott, 'Sextus Afranius Burrus', pp 248–54, sees Burrus as a *protégé* of Seneca.

133. This omission is unusual, since it is possible that he was the first praetorian prefect to receive such an honour. Cf. McDermott, 'Sextus Afranius Burrus', p 233.

134. On Burrus' role in Nero's reign see Tacitus, *Annals* 13.2.1; Barrett, *Agrippina*, pp 142–3.

135. Tacitus, *Annals* 13.14.3. Shortly after this episode, Britannicus died, though it is not clear whether he was murdered; see Chapter 4.

136. Tacitus, *Annals* 13.18.3. Cf. also Suetonius, *Nero* 34.1.

137. The consequence for Agrippina of the deprivation of this bodyguard and of being denied quarters in the palace was that she was shunned. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 13.19.1; Dio 61.8.6. In fact, shortly after her isolation, no doubt bolstered by the obvious change which had occurred in Agrippina's status, a charge of inciting revolution was brought against her by a former friend, Junia Silana. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 13.19–21.

138. Tacitus, *Annals* 14.3.1. Cf. Barrett, *Agrippina*, p 156.

139. For the involvement of the praetorians in the murders of imperial family members see Chapter 4.

140. Tacitus, *Annals* 14.3.3.

141. It has been suggested that Nero was forced to rely upon the fleet because he felt that he could not trust the praetorians while Burrus was in command; see Barrett, *Agrippina*, p 184. But clearly Anicetus – and his position – is key here.

142. Tacitus, *Annals* 14.8.2–5. After the murder, Anicetus returned to his post until confessing, at Nero's command, to a false charge of adultery with the empress Octavia in order to provide a motive for her removal. He was exiled to Sardinia in AD 62. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals*

14.62.2–4; Suetonius, *Nero* 35.2. On his exile, see S. Bingham, ‘Life on an island: a brief study of places of exile in the first century AD’, *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* 11 (2003), pp 388–90 (though the conclusions drawn there regarding this exile have been challenged by Fred K. Drogula, ‘Controlling travel: deportation, island and the regulation of senatorial mobility in the Augustan principate’, *CQ* 61.1 (2010–11), p 241, note 54).

143. Barrett, *Agrippina*, p 190: ‘[The praetorians’] loyalty to Agrippina was clearly tempered by a practical realism.’ The official account was repeated in a letter to the senate in which Nero claimed that his mother wanted to be co-ruler with him, symbolized by having the oath of allegiance sworn to her separately, rather than being included with the imperial household. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 14.11.1.

144. Tacitus, *Annals* 14.10.2.

145. Dio 61.14.3. This grant does not appear in other sources, however. On donatives in general see Chapter 3.

146. Burrus continued in his position until his death in AD 62. Almost all the ancient sources record that he was poisoned but Tacitus admits the possibility of a natural death. See Tacitus, *Annals* 14.51.1–3; cf. also Suetonius, *Nero* 35.5; Dio 62.13.3. The reason given by Dio for the murder was the prefect’s opposition to Nero divorcing his wife Octavia in order to marry his mistress Poppaea. McDermott, ‘Sextus Afranius Burrus’, p 253, in support of the story of murder, points to the words used by Tacitus (*infausta dona*) when discussing the grant of Burrus’ estate (as well as that of Rubellius Plautus) to Octavia: ‘These properties would have been *infausta* only if they had belonged to men who had suffered some unnatural misfortune.’ On Plautus see Chapter 4.

147. On this event see Tacitus, *Histories* 1.5; Suetonius, *Nero* 47–8; Dio 63.27.2–3.

148. Nymphidius was the son of a freedwoman who was the daughter of Callistus, the powerful freedman of Gaius and Claudius. See Plutarch, *Galba* 9.2.

149. Rudich, *Political Dissidence*, p 130. On the conspiracy see Chapter 3.

150. The other prefect, Gaius Ofonius Tigellinus, went with Nero, though it is not known how many of the guard went with him.

151. Dio 63.19–20.

152. Tacitus, *Histories* 1.5.1. As Campbell, *Emperor*, p 85, notes, a

speech to the guard when there were exceptional circumstances was seen as an opportunity to test the loyalty of the army: ‘the reaction of the soldiers on the spot to this kind of political speech could be decisive and their example might influence the conduct of others’.

153. Plutarch, *Galba* 2.2; cf. Suetonius, *Galba* 16.1; Tacitus, *Histories* 1.5.1; Josephus, *BJ* 4.492–3; Champlin, *Nero*, p 4; Miriam Griffin, *Nero: The End of a Dynasty* (London, 1984), pp 185–6.

154. Suetonius, *Galba* 11; Plutarch, *Galba* 8–14; Gwyn Morgan, *69 AD: The Year of Four Emperors* (Oxford, 2006), pp 39–41. For a different interpretation of the event – that Nymphidius had changed his allegiance from Galba to another senator rather than desiring power for himself – see Sandra Ottley, ‘The coup of Nymphidius Sabinus’, *AHB* 24 (2010), pp 95–113.

155. The period is covered in detail by Sandra Ottley, *The Role Played by the Praetorian Guard in the Events of AD 69 as Described by Tacitus in his Historiae* (unpublished dissertation, University of Western Australia, 2009).

156. See Tacitus, *Histories* 1.5; Plutarch, *Galba* 15.3–4, 18.2; Dio 64.3.1–2. Tacitus, *Histories* 1.20, points out that the dismissals especially were greeted with suspicion since the remaining officers felt insecure about their positions as well. See also Morgan, *69 AD*, pp 61–2, who notes that the removal of the officers may indicate problems with maintaining discipline.

157. Tacitus, *Histories* 1.24. Most scholars place the first phase of Otho’s seduction of the guard on the journey with Galba from Spain to Rome, based on the passage of Tacitus. But it is not at all clear from the Latin whether these ‘soldiers’ were indeed praetorians, and it is more likely that they were regular legionaries since it is not clear why praetorians would be on this journey. See C. Damon, *Tacitus, Histories Book I* (Cambridge, 2003), p 152. Morgan (*69 AD*, p 58) and G.E.F. Chilver (‘The army in politics, A.D. 68–70’, *JRS* 47 (1957), p 33) both prefer these soldiers to be men of the VII Galbiana.

158. Tacitus, *Histories* 1.25–8; Suetonius, *Otho* 5. What is interesting here is the position of those praetorians who were used to convince their fellow soldiers to go over to Otho; in both sources, these men are described as *speculatores*, a special branch of the guard, normally used for more clandestine purposes. In Chapter 24, Tacitus records the grant of land to a *speculator* named Cocceius Proculus, a substantial gift; bribes like this no doubt helped Otho in his cause. On the *speculatores* see Chapter 4

159. Tacitus, *Histories* 1.29; 38–41; Suetonius, *Galba* 19–20; Morgan, 69 AD, pp 70–1.

160. Tacitus, *Histories* 1.46; Morgan, 69 AD, p 94.

161. Morgan, 69 AD, p 95.

162. On the date see Morgan, 69 AD, p 306, n. 10.

163. The episode is recounted in Tacitus, *Histories* 1.80–5. Damon (Tacitus, *Histories*, p 262) suggests that these soldiers could have been intended to serve as a replacement for the city cohorts being sent north against Vitellius, while Morgan (69 AD, p 106–7) argues that the cohort from Ostia was to be part of the expedition itself; see also G.E.F. Chilver, *A Historical Commentary on Tacitus' Histories I and II* (Oxford, 1979), pp 146–8.

164. On the possible location of the armoury see Chapter 3.

165. Tacitus, *Histories* 1.82. The donative promised was a substantial sum (5,000 sesterces), though this amount is less than that promised by Nymphidius and actually paid by both Claudius and Nero at the start of their reigns.

166. Tacitus, *Histories* 1.87.1, where the author notes that both urban cohorts and praetorians accompanied Otho, referring to the latter as the ‘backbone’ of the army. Chilver, *A Historical Commentary*, p 156, comments that the phrase used here (*viris et robur*) ‘implies quality rather than quantity’. The guard had last fought with Germanicus in AD 16, though the mock exercises held by Gaius in Germany had also involved praetorians; cf. Suetonius, *Gaius* 45.1. On Germanicus see Chapter 4.

167. Tacitus, *Histories* 2.11.

168. And some of the praetorians already had been sent to Narbonese Gaul, as noted by Tacitus (*Histories* 1.87.1). It has been suggested that ‘up to 7 cohorts’ could have gone with Otho, but that seems unlikely; see R. Ash, *Tacitus: Histories Book II* (Cambridge, 2007), p 108.

169. See, for example, Tacitus, *Histories* 2.22 and especially 2.44, where he comments specifically on the courage of the praetorians. Plutarch (*Otho* 12.9) gives a less favourable account of the praetorians, saying that they acted shamefully in fleeing from battle. For discussion on the significance of this episode for the question of the effective see Chapter 3.

170. Tacitus, *Histories* 2.49.

171. Tacitus, *Histories* 2.67; cf. also Suetonius, *Vitellius* 10.1. The discharged praetorians make another appearance in 2.96, where they are held responsible by Vitellius for spreading rumours about the possibility of further civil war.

172. Tacitus, *Histories* 2.93.2. On the Vitellian change to the cohorts see Chapter 3.

173. On the coin see *RIC* I, #118; Hekster, 'The Roman army and propaganda', p 341. For the prevalence of Concordia on coins in times of discord, the reign of Septimius Severus provides an illustrative case: there are numerous issues associating Concordia with the imperial family, in particular, with Severus' sons, Caracalla and Geta, who notoriously did not get along, and also with Caracalla and Plautilla, his wife, whom he was said to despise. But it was important that the public image of the family be presented as harmonious; that also must be the case here, with the army as the target audience.

174. For example, at the second battle of Bedriacum; see Tacitus, *Histories* 3.16–33.

175. Tacitus, *Histories* 2.67, 82; 3.24.

176. Tacitus, *Histories* 3.84.

177. On the accommodation made for all these men after Vespasian's victory see Chapter 3.

178. Evidence for the reduction in number of cohorts is given in a diploma dated to AD 76; see *ILS* 1993 (= Campbell, *The Roman Army*, #327), discussed in Chapter 3.

179. See Dio 64.22.2; B. Levick, *Vespasian* (London, 1990), p 95.

180. For the pay rise, and pay rates in general for the guard, see Chapter 3. This increase in pay may partly explain the guard's anger at the murder of Domitian, and their demands a year later for the punishment of his murderers, on which see below.

181. It was under Domitian that the praetorian prefect was first sent to the field in command of the army: Cornelius Fuscus was sent to Dacia and died in battle in AD 86 or 87. See Suetonius, *Domitian* 6.1; Dio 67.6.6; 68.9.3. He also appears in Juvenal, *Satire* 4, lines 110–12. It is not clear how many of the guard went with him, but a praetorian soldier who died in the same Dacian War is commemorated by the poet Martial (6.76). It is possible that some cohorts of the guard went north as early as 84/85 in preparation for this war; see M. Roxan and W. Eck, 'A military diploma of AD 85 for the Rome cohorts', *ZPE* 96 (1993), pp 67–74, especially p 72.

182. For the late first century, Suetonius and Dio are the main literary sources, with occasional remarks in authors such as Pliny the Younger, Martial and Statius. The situation for the early second century is even less promising: Pliny again, Dio in fragments only and the notoriously unreliable *Historia Augusta*.

183. See Absil, *Les Préfets*, pp 46–53; Syme, ‘Guard prefects’, pp 64–80.

184. See Suetonius, *Titus* 6; Tacitus, *Histories* 4.68; B. Jones, *Domitian* (London, 1992), p 60. It is possible that Clemens had been rewarded with senatorial status as one of Vespasian’s adherents; see G. Houston, ‘Vespasian’s adlection of men in senatum’, *AJPh* 98.1 (1977), p 58.

185. See Absil, *Les Préfets*, p 33.

186. It is not clear whether Titus remained praetorian prefect when he became emperor; there is no evidence for a replacement.

187. It has been suggested that the praetorians’ role in the murder has been ‘obscured by distortions in the ancient sources ... [they] are unclear about the role of the Praetorians in the plot to murder Domitian’; cf. H. Flower, ‘A tale of two monuments: Domitian, Trajan and some praetorians at Puteoli (AE 1973, 137)’, *AJA* 105.4, p 643. But there is simply no evidence for their involvement and one need not go looking for it. On the murder see Chapter 4.

188. Suetonius, *Domitian* 23.1.

189. Pliny, *Panegyricus* 6.1; Dio 68.3.3; John D. Grainger, *Nerva and the Roman Succession Crisis of AD 96–99* (London, 2003), pp 94–6. For a thorough assessment of this event, see A. Berriman and Malcolm Todd, ‘A very Roman coup: the hidden war of imperial succession, AD 96–98’, *Historia* 50.3 (2001), pp 324–9.

190. Pliny, *Panegyricus* 6.1. It is possible that the *CONCORDIA EXERCITUUM* coin issues under Nerva were intended to allay fears regarding the guard; see Flower, ‘A tale of two monuments’, p 643, n. 119.

191. Suetonius, *Domitian*. 23.1. Julian Bennett, *Trajan: Optimus Princeps* (London, 1997), pp 40–1, sees the action as precipitated by indiscipline among the praetorians, but such a situation was unlikely to have lasted for nearly a year.

192. Berriman and Todd, ‘A very Roman coup’, p 325.

193. Berriman and Todd, ‘A very Roman coup’, p 326; Flower, ‘A tale of two monuments’, pp 643–4.

194. Berriman and Todd, 'A very Roman coup', pp 326–7; Syme, *Tacitus*, p 35, n. 4: 'Indeed nothing proves that Trajan was not the candidate of the Prefect of the Guard.'

195. As argued by Berriman and Todd, 'A very Roman coup', p 328, 'There must have been negotiations prior to Nerva's public adoption of his heir – but it is difficult to see how this could have been achieved while the emperor was a virtual hostage of his Guard, unless Aelianus and his men were the very conduits for that negotiation and the adoption of Trajan was the ulterior demand of the rebels.'

196. Dio 68.5.4. Cf. also Pliny, *Panegyricus* 5.

197. As noted by Berriman and Todd, 'A very Roman coup', p 327, who suggest that Aelianus was 'Trajan's man' and so he and his soldiers went north without suspecting anything. For the traditional interpretation, see, for example, Flower, 'A tale of two monuments', p 644: 'One of [Trajan's] first acts as emperor ... was to summon the Praetorian commanders and their most loyal followers among the Guardsmen to his headquarters at Mogontiacum (Mainz) in Germany, where he rapidly executed them without any judicial process.'

198. There are other examples of men who assisted emperors in the capital and who were later removed to avoid embarrassment: one might adduce Anicetus, who assisted Nero in the removal of his mother and wife and was sent to Sardinia, or Julius Pollio, who had a role in the removal of Britannicus under the same emperor. On Anicetus see above; for Pollio see Tacitus, *Annals* 13.15.3–5. Two inscriptions (*CIL* 10.7952 and 10.7863) from Sardinia record his tenure in the guard and in the urban cohorts. Berriman and Todd, 'A very Roman coup', p 328, with n. 81, offer further examples.

199. Pliny, *Panegyricus* 23.3; see also 24.2. It should be noted that Speidel, *Riding for Caesar*, p 42, refers to these men as *equites singulares Augusti*, but he sees a waning of influence for the praetorians at this time, which is not borne out by the evidence; see below. Even without specific designation in the text, 'soldiers' in the capital closely associated with the emperor are likely to be praetorians.

200. Pliny, *Panegyricus* 25.2; cf. 41.1.

201. Dio 66.26.3.

202. Bennett, *Trajan*, p 59.

203. Speidel, *Riding for Caesar*, p 43. The date of creation of this unit is disputed: it was under either Domitian or Trajan. For the background see Speidel, *Riding for Caesar*, pp 36–7.

204. They functioned much as the *Germani corporis custodes* had in the early imperial period; see Speidel, *Riding for Caesar*, pp 39–41.

205. Speidel comments that '[h]aving killed a number of praetorians, Trajan could not trust soldiers of that unit with his life'; see *Riding for Caesar*, p 43. But if that had been the case, it is odd that Vespasian, who attained the principate through civil war, had no problem accommodating those members of the guard who had fought for his enemies; see Chapter 3.

206. See Figure 4. A date of AD 102 has been proposed for this arch; see Flower, 'A tale of two monuments', pp 635–48, who provides a full discussion of the relief.

207. See Figure 5. On shield decorations and the guard in art see Chapter 3.

208. Flower, 'A tale of two monuments', p 644.

209. As noted by Flower, *ibid*: 'Far from being publicly disgraced, [the praetorians'] function as the loyal attendants of the new emperor was celebrated in the early years of his reign. Such a depiction would make no sense if they had only recently been relegated to other duties and if Trajan had travelled to Puteoli and to other towns without them.'

210. The wars are not well documented in the literary sources, with the fragments of Dio (68.6–15) providing only a basic outline.

211. For epigraphic evidence of praetorians involved in this war, see, for example, the inscription for the centurion, Lucius Aemilius Paternus (*CIL* 2.4461 (= *ILS* 2661); translated in Campbell, *The Roman Army* #172); Paternus, decorated for bravery in this campaign by Trajan, was involved as well against the Parthians. A second example is provided by that of Gaius Arrius Clemens (*CIL* 11.5646 (= *ILS* 2081); translated in Campbell, *The Roman Army* #91), discussed in Chapter 3.

212. On the Column itself see F.A. Lepper and S.S. Frere, *Trajan's Column: A New Edition of the Cichorius Plates* (Gloucester, 1988); Lino Rossi (trans J.M.C. Toynbee), *Trajan's Column and the Dacian Wars* (London, 1971). Rossi (pp 100–2) notes the conventions regarding the depiction of legionaries and praetorians.

213. See Figure 6; cf. also the images in Lepper and Frere, *Trajan's Column*, plates VII–VIII.

214. Lepper and Frere, *Trajan's Column*, plate XVIII (= Rossi, image 19). See also Rossi: *Trajan's Column*, pp 161–2 (with image 53);

215. *CIL* 11.2661 (= *ILS* 2081; translated in Campbell, *The Roman Army*, #91), discussed in Chapter 3. Praetorians also may be represented on the Adamklissi monument, which celebrated Trajan's victory over the Dacians, though the identification is controversial. Cf. M.B. Charles, 'Trajan's guard at Adamklissi: infantry or cavalry?', *Historia* 53.4 (2004), pp 476–89.

216. *ILS* 8846. Victorinus later (AD 167) died on campaign, though it is not clear whether in battle or from plague. He was commemorated by a statue in Trajan's Forum, though the inscription (*ILS* 9002) is incomplete, hence the uncertainty about the manner of his death. On his career, see B. Rossignol, 'Les préfets du prétoire de Marc Aurèle', *Cahiers du Centre Gustave-Glotz* 18 (2007), pp 146–9 (my thanks to Michael Crawford for the reference). On the wars in the period see A.R. Birley, 'The wars and revolts', in M. van Ackeren (ed), *A Companion to Marcus Aurelius* (Oxford, 2012), pp 217–33.

217. The prefects were Marcus Bassaeus Rufus and Marcus Macrinus Vindex. See Dio 71.3.5; 5.2–3; Rossignol, 'Les préfets', pp 149–55. The depiction of praetorians on the Column of Marcus Aurelius again illustrates their key role; see F. Coarelli (trans H. Patterson), *The Column of Marcus Aurelius* (Rome, 2008), pp 119, 128, 130; M. Beckmann, *The Column of Marcus Aurelius: The Genesis and Meaning of a Roman Imperial Monument* (Chapel Hill, 2011), pp 152–4 (who notes that soldiers in scale armour generally are interpreted as praetorians; on praetorian equipment see Chapter 3).

218. These sources include Dio (who is in epitomes for much of the period), Herodian and the *Historia Augusta*.

219. *Historia Augusta*, *Marcus Aurelius Antoninus* 7.9. The size of the donative, if accurate, may reflect the double accession rather than any uncertainty about the loyalty of the guard, as noted by A.R. Birley, 'Marcus' life as emperor', in M. van Ackeren (ed), *A Companion to Marcus Aurelius* (Oxford, 2012), p 156.

220. *Fragmenta Vaticana* #195; Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 380. It is possible that this act was to compensate the guard for problems with citizens in the capital, since it is thought that the praetorians were responsible for bringing plague back to the city from the north; see A.R. Birley, 'Hadrian to the Antonines', in Alan K. Bowman et al (eds), *Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. XI (Cambridge, 2000), pp 167–8.

221. Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, pp 132 (with note 39 on

the epigraphic evidence), 157 (with note 37). The term ‘outposted soldiers’ is his (he discusses the difficulty of the terminology on pp 249–52).

222. *Ibid.*, p 157.

223. See, for example, Howe, *Praetorian Prefects*, pp 65–6 (who refers to Perennis as ‘vice-emperor’); Absil, *Les Préfets*, pp 184–5; Birley, ‘Hadrian to the Antonines’, p 187. On Perennis’ career see O. Hekster, *Commodus. An Emperor at the Crossroads* (Amsterdam, 2002), pp 60–4.

224. Hekster: *Commodus*, pp 55–6.

225. *Ibid.*, pp 69–70.

226. For example, M. Peachin, ‘Rome the superpower: 96–235 CE’, in D. Potter (ed), *The Roman Empire* (Oxford, 2011), p 140: ‘Cleander held what appears to have been a unique position in the history of the imperial administration. He was known as the *a pugione*, literally the “Master of the Dagger”, though this title ought probably to have implied something more like “Commander of the Imperial Bodyguard”.’ Hekster, *Commodus*, p 70, sees it as an attempt by the emperor to weaken the power of the prefecture. On the title see *Historia Augusta*, *Commodus* 6.1, where the office is treated as equivalent to the praetorian prefects. Epigraphic evidence is provided by *AE* 1961, 280. Herodian (1.12.3) mentions the appointment but without the title.

227. Dio 73.13. On Cleander’s fall see Hekster, *Commodus*, pp 72–5.

228. Dio 73.22.1–6; Herodian 1.16–17. On Laetus see Howe, *Praetorian Prefects*, pp 13, 41–2, 68. For discussion of the plot see Hekster, *Commodus*, pp 80–3.

229. Herodian 2.5.1; Dio 74.16.3.

230. As successor: Dio 74.1.2; Herodian 2.1–5. Murder: Dio 74.9.1–10.3; Herodian 2.5.1–9.

231. Dio 74.8.1; Herodian 2.4.1, who records that the praetorians were told specifically to stop harassment of the citizens; see also 2.4.4. It is not clear why there had been such a breakdown in discipline, but the murder of Commodus might have angered the soldiers, given his popularity with the soldiers, on which see Hekster, *Commodus*, pp 164–5.

232. The number of praetorians involved in the murder – 200 as recorded by Dio – shows that this was an impulsive act, one that did not extend far within the guard. In fact, Dio (74.9.3) indicates that

Pertinax had at his disposal both praetorians and *equites singulares* with which he could have killed his assassins, but he chose not to use them. Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, p 128, n. 17, errs in interpreting the ‘night guard’ of this passage as *vigiles*, for there would be no reason for them to be at the palace; it must be the cohort on duty that night that is meant and the terminology used here is different from the usual expression for the *vigiles*.

233. Dio 74.6.3; 8.1–9.2. For possible reasons and Laetus’ role in the murder see A. Appelbaum, ‘Another look at the assassination of Pertinax and the accession of Julianus’, *CPh* 102 (2007), pp 203–6. C.R. Whittaker, *Herodian* (London, 1969), p 159, n. 2, comments on the ‘double game’ that the prefect was playing: ‘[he] used the soldiers’ discontent and the freedmen to further another candidate, perhaps by this time thinking of Septimius Severus.’ For a more nuanced view of Laetus’ possible motives see T.D. Barnes, ‘The family and career of Septimius Severus’, *Historia* 16.1 (1967), pp 87–107, especially pp 100–1.

234. Dio 74.11; Herodian 2.6.4–11. It should be noted that Dio makes a similar claim regarding Otho, criticizing him for revealing that the empire was for sale; see 63.9.1.

235. *Historia Augusta*, *Didius Julianus* 2.

236. Herodian’s account (2.6.3) includes just such a delay (‘after one or two days’); while it is unlikely that Dio would have erred in the chronology, given that he was present at the senate, it is possible that he has compressed events. On the chronology see Whittaker, *Herodian*, p 171, n. 3.

237. The promise of a donative by both Sulpicianus and Julianus must be the source of the story about a ‘bidding war’, but whether there were rival amounts offered is not clear; Dio’s bias against the military, in particular the guard, must be taken into account when assessing his version.

238. Dio 74.11.6; Herodian 2.6.9; *Historia Augusta*, *Didius Julianus* 2.6. For a slightly different interpretation of this event, see Appelbaum, ‘Another look’, pp 198–207; his question as to how the prefect of the city could settle things in the praetorian camp (p 204) is resolved by the fact that the urban cohorts were still housed at this time together with the guard and that must be why Sulpicianus was sent: to deal with the cohorts under his command.

239. Dio 75.1.1; Herodian (2.9.8) emphasizes the breaking of their

oath as the reason for punishment of the praetorians.

240. Herodian 2.13.1–2.

241. Dio and Herodian offer two different versions of the way in which the guard was dismissed, though in both cases, the soldiers seem completely unaware of their fate; see Dio 75.1.1–2; Herodian 2.13.

242. It has been noted that Severus would have saved a sizeable sum of money with this action; see P. Herz, ‘Finances and costs of the Roman army’, in P. Erdkamp (ed), *A Companion to the Roman Army* (Oxford, 2007), p 318.

243. Dio 75.2.4–6; Herodian 2.14.5.

244. On the use of the Severan guard as a core for his field army, see Cowan, *Aspects of the Severan Field Army*, *passim*.

245. The use of legionaries in the guard may be seen as part of the wider militarization of the empire undertaken by Severus, who also put a legion on Italian soil for the first time, the II Parthica at Albanum. On Severus’ military reforms see E. Birley, ‘Septimius Severus and the Roman army’, *Epigraphische Studien* 8 (1969), pp 63–82; R.E. Smith, ‘The Roman army reforms of Septimius Severus’, *Historia* 21 (1972), pp 481–99.

246. Dio 75.2.5–6.

247. Dio 75.2.6. He concentrates mostly on their appearance and lack of urbanity.

248. Dio 77.10. Bulla may have been a former guardsman dismissed in AD 193; he managed to evade Severus’ men for two years, being captured only through being betrayed. On this episode see Fuhmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, pp 134–8 (who questions whether the story is not just a literary construct).

249. Dio 80.2.2–3. The date is not certain, but the incident occurred before the death of Ulpian in AD 223.

250. On the relationship between soldier and civilian in the capital, see Coulston, ‘Armed and belted men’, pp 89–91.

251. Dio 80.2.2; cf. Herodian 6.9. Ulpian, instrumental in the very early stages of the reign of Alexander Severus, was murdered by praetorians in AD 223; that he had taken refuge in the palace with Alexander and his mother, Julia Mamaea, was not enough to save him from the wrath of the soldiers. On the chronology see R. Cleve, ‘Cassius Dio and Ulpian’, *AHB* 2 (1988), pp 118–24; J. Modrzejewski

and Z. Zawadzki, 'La date de la mort d'Ulpien et la préfecture du prétoire au début du règne d'Alexandre Sévère', *RD* 45 (1967), pp 565–611.

252. Dio 80.5.1–2. It was Dio's strict attitude to discipline that seems to have been the problem. See 80.4.2.

253. See, for example, Dio 78.3.1–2; 9.1; 10.4. Cf. also Herodian 4.3.4; 4.3–8. Animosity between the brothers was long-standing and though the sources favour Geta and are virulent in their hatred of Caracalla, it is clear that one or the other of the two would win through eventually.

254. Dio 79.4–6. The plot involved several of the officers, mainly tribunes. This accession marked the first time that an equestrian had become emperor. On Macrinus see D. Baharal, 'The Emperor Macrinus', in E. dal Covolo and G. Rinaldi (eds), *Gli Imperatori Severi* (Rome, 1996), pp 46–65.

255. On the displeasure of the soldiers – specifically the guard – with the new emperor, see Dio 79.17.4. He mentions the change of conditions for all of the soldiers in 79.28.1–2.

256. Dio 79.31–40. The guard had been with Caracalla in the east and would have taken part in the struggles between Macrinus' forces and those soldiers supporting Elagabalus. The text of Dio at this point is quite corrupt, with many lacunae, so specific details are often hard to discern. Herodian (5.4.8) mentions the praetorians fighting for Macrinus.

257. On Elagabalus' devotion to the god whose name he took see M. Icks, *The Crimes of Elagabalus* (London, 2011), pp 48–52, 72–88. Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado makes much of this association in his work on the emperor, *The Emperor Elagabalus: Fact or Fiction?* (Cambridge, 2010).

258. Dio 80.18.4; cf. also Herodian 5.8.1.

259. Dio 80.17.2–3, 19.1–4; Herodian 5.7.4. On the adoption, see S. Dušanić, 'Severus Alexander as Elagabalus' associate', *Historia* 13.4 (1964), pp 487–98. The sources also have the mothers of the two young men at odds with each other; for example, Herodian (5.8.3) comments on Julia Mamaea offering money secretly to bring soldiers over to his side.

260. Dio 80.19.2; Herodian 5.8.2.

261. Dio 80.20.1–2; Herodian 5.8.5–8. The influence of Julia Maesa, grandmother to both young men, must be acknowledged as

well in Elagabalus' demise; see, for example, Herodian 5.8.3–4; Icks, *The Crimes*, pp 37–40.

262. There were no real problems, such as civil war, invasions or epidemics during the reign, as noted by Icks, *The Crimes*, p 88. But the praetorians in particular, now formed of legionary soldiers, struggled with the behaviour of the emperor in Rome.

263. Alexander was murdered along with his mother by soldiers on the north frontier in the spring of 235, having been abandoned by his guard. See Herodian 6.8.5–9.7.

264. Herodian 7.11.2–9. On this episode see Y. Rivière, 'Les batailles de Rome: présence militaire et guerrilla urbaine à l'époque impériale', *Histoire Urbaine* 10 (2004), pp 82–4.

265. Herodian 8.8.1–2.

266. As noted by A. Birley, 'Making emperors. Imperial instrument or independent force?', in P. Erdkamp (ed), *A Companion to the Roman Army* (Oxford, 2007), p 389: 'Herodian ends with the year 238 ... for the next half century reliable information is lacking. The fullest source, the *Historia Augusta*, can here hardly be trusted at all, and the others, the Latins, principally Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, and the *Epitome de Caesaribus*, or the Greeks, Zosimus, Zonaras, and the Byzantine chroniclers, are brief, scrappy, and confused.'

267. Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, pp 136–7.

268. For example, there is numismatic evidence to suggest that the praetorians took part in campaigns under Gallienus in AD 261; see *RIC* V, #370–2; Figure 7.

269. Millar, *The Emperor*, p 65.

270. On the changes to the military in the late empire see Y. Le Bohec, *L'Armée Romaine sous le Bas-Empire* (Paris, 2006), *passim*; K. Strobel, 'Strategy and army structure between Septimius Severus and Constantine the Great', in P. Erdkamp (ed), *A Companion to the Roman Army* (Oxford, 2007), pp 267–85.

271. Lactantius, *de Mort.* 12. For the praetorian cavalry with Galerius in Egypt in the mid-290s, along with the *equites singulares*, see Speidel, *Riding for Caesar*, p 73. The bodyguard accompanying the emperor in scenes on the Arch of Galerius may also include praetorians; for the images see M.S. Pond Rothman, 'The thematic organisation of the panel reliefs on the Arch of Galerius', *AJA* 81 (1977), pp 427–54 (especially figure 19).

272. The picture is quite different when looking at the praetorian

prefects; a number of powerful individuals held the office from the late second century onwards and, by the end of the third century, the prefect was treated as the emperor's deputy with a shift to more administrative responsibilities. Their importance is seen in the fact that the position continued even after the guard itself had been disbanded. See P. Porena, 'À l'ombre de la pourpre: l'évolution de la préfecture du prétoire entre le IIIe et le IVe siècle', *Cahiers du Centre Gustave-Glotz* 18 (2007), pp 237–62; Howe, *Praetorian Prefects*; T.D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Harvard, 1981), Chapter VIII, 'Praetorian Prefects'.

273. Aurelius Victor, *de Caes.* 39.47. Bird, in his commentary on the text, postulates that the reduction in number was substantial and that the reasons for not disbanding the unit included 'the prestige of the city and its turbulent mob'; see H.W. Bird, *Aurelius Victor. De Caesaribus* (Liverpool, 1994), p 176, n. 36.

274. Lactantius, *de Mort.* 26.2. The author attributes the declaration for Maxentius with the emperor's decision to tax the populace of Rome for the first time and with the reduction of the guard.

275. Aurelius Victor *de Caes.* 40.5; Eutropius 10.2. The co-Augustus was Severus, with Constantine and Maximinus Daia as Caesars.

276. On the support of the people, see Bird, *Aurelius Victor*, p 180, n. 6.

277. Eusebius *HE* 8.14.3; *Vita Const.* 1.35. Cf. also Aurelius Victor, *de Caes.* 40.24.

278. Aurelius Victor, *de Caes.* 40.24–25; Zosimus 2.17.2. The praetorians were sent to fight on the frontiers, according to *Pan. Lat.* 12 (9) 21.2–3. It is not clear what happened to any praetorians not in Rome. On the unit that replaced the guard, see R.I. Frank, *Scholae Palatinae: The Palace Guards of the Later Roman Empire* (Rome, 1969); Le Bohec: *L'Armée Romaine*, pp 68–70. On the destruction of the camp and its meaning, see A.W. Busch, "'Militia in urbe'". The military presence in Rome', in L. de Blois and E. Lo Cascio (eds), *The Impact of the Roman Army (200 BC–AD 476): Economic, Social, Political, Religious and Cultural Aspects* (Leiden, 2007), p 331.

3. ORGANIZATION

1. Dio 55.24.6. It is of note that, although providing an account of the military under Augustus, it is only for the city cohorts that Dio seems able to give specific numbers.

2. Tacitus, *Annals* 4.5.3.

3. H. Freis, *Die Cohortes Urbanae* (Köln, 1967), pp 36–7; Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 77. The date at which the urban cohorts were established is not certain. It is possible that they were set up at the same time as the guard, but it has also been suggested that the establishment occurred late in Augustus' reign. See Freis, *Urbanae*, pp 4–6; Passerini, *Le Coorti*, pp 44–5. On the unit itself see Chapter 4. The numbering of the urban cohorts may add to the view that, early in their history, there were nine praetorian cohorts, for the urban units used X to XII from their inception (though the Xth urban cohort is attested first under Domitian; see Cecilia Ricci, 'In custodiam urbis: notes on the *cohortes urbanae* (1968–2010)', *Historia* 60.4 (2011), p 486, with n. 6).

4. On distinguishing praetorian cohorts from the legions see Durry, *Les Cohortes*, pp 77–8; Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army*, p 153. The idea of fluctuating numbers was first put forward by Passerini in his discussion on the number of cohorts in the early principate (*Le Coorti*, pp 44–9).

5. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 78, lists six inscriptions which mention the XIth cohort and six which mention the XIIth cohort; all are without a firm date, though he places them in the first century AD. Keppie, 'The praetorian guard', p 108, notes that the XIIth cohort is 'securely attested' in AD 65. See below.

6. For example, Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 79. Several recent works have continued to be cautious; for example, Le Bohec (*Imperial Roman Army*, p 21), who simply states that the increase happened before AD 47.

7. AE 1978, #286 (translated in Campbell, *The Roman Army*, #96); the important lines for this discussion are the first four:

A. Virgio L. f. Marso, | prim. pil. leg. III Gallicae | iterum, praef. castr. Aegy., | praef. fabr., tr. mil. in praet. | divi Aug. et Ti. Caesaris Aug. | cohort. XI et IIII praetoriar.

(To Aulus Virgius Marsus, son of Lucius, chief centurion of the III Legio Gallica for a second time, prefect of the camp in Egypt, prefect of engineers, military tribune in the praetorian guard of the divine Augustus and Tiberius Caesar Augustus of the eleventh and fourth praetorian cohorts ...)

The inscription receives extensive discussion in C. Letta, 'Le imagines Caesarum di un praefectus castrorum Aegypti e l'XI coorte pretoria', *Athenaeum* 56 (1978), pp 3–19; and B. Dobson, 'Praefectus

castrorum Aegypti – a reconsideration’, *Chronique d’Egypte* 57 (1982), pp 322–37. The exact date of the stone is unknown.

8. Inversion on Marsus’ stone was argued by Letta (‘Le imagines’, p 11). For other examples on military inscriptions see Dobson, ‘Praefectus castrorum Aegypti’, p 328. Dobson suggests that Marsus may have wanted to ‘emphasize the distinction ... of serving two emperors in the responsible task’, and he notes that the ‘placing of a post ... out of chronological order in a career to emphasize some special point about it is a common practice’.

9. Two other interpretations have been proposed, however. The editor of *AE* (1978) argued that praetorian cohorts X and XI came into existence at the very end of the reign of Augustus only to be disbanded by Tiberius prior to AD 23 so as to number nine in that year (as recorded in Tacitus). This explanation, though maintaining the order of the tribunates in the inscription, seems unlikely since it would mean the discharge of two entire cohorts after only a few years’ service. Demougin, *Prosopographie*, p 270, proposed that Marsus’ first tribunate was with the XIth urban cohort, a view also taken by Keppie, ‘The praetorian guard’, pp 109–10. While this solution maintains the order of the tribunates in the inscription, the absence of the adjective *urbanae* is troubling, though, as Keppie points out, not entirely unknown. Ricci, ‘*In custodiam urbis*’, p 486, notes that ‘the epithet *urbana* first appears in a late Augustan or early Tiberian text’, but then concludes (p 487) that Marsus (named as Gallicus in her text) served in the XIth urban cohort and was promoted to the IVth praetorian. But if, as she maintains, the inscription ‘demonstrates the original connection between the Urban Cohorts and the Praetorian’, that is, that the praetorian cohorts used I–IX and the urban X–XII, why the need to add *praetoriarum* to the designation of the IVth cohort? The suggestion that all of the cohorts initially may have had the epithet *praetoria* (p 486, n. 6) is not credible.

10. *ILS* 2701, dating to AD 65. It is possible that this third cohort was created at the same time as the other two under Tiberius, as is often assumed by scholars.

11. Tacitus, *Histories* 2.93.2: *insuper confusus pravitate vel ambitu ordo militiae: sedecim praetoriae, quattuor urbanae cohortes scribebantur, quis singula milia inessent*. On the praetorians’ role in the year 69 see Chapter 2. Vitellius held power from April to December.

12. Suetonius, *Vitellius* 10.

13. Tacitus, *Histories* 2.94. It has been suggested that Tacitus’

language here suggests that some of the recruits were ‘unsuitable’; see Ash, *Tacitus*, pp 361–2. Of interest is the inclusion of auxiliaries among the new praetorians, though it is not clear how many were enrolled. Passerini, *Le Coorti*, p 169, lists an inscription for an auxiliary (AE 1932, 30), and Tacitus’ language (*alaris* in 2.94) suggests that non-citizen soldiers were enrolled, according to Chilver (*A Historical Commentary*, p 255). Ash, *Tacitus*, p 362, notes the unusual use of the adjective as a noun, and translates it as ‘auxiliary cavalry units’.

14. The number of cohorts is based on *CIL* 16.21 (= *ILS* 1993; translated in Campbell, *The Roman Army*, #327). A military diploma in which specific reference is made to the *speculatores*, as well as to nine praetorian and four urban cohorts, it dates to AD 76. For further discussion of this diploma and on military diplomas in general see below.

15. Tacitus, *Histories* 4.46; Levick, *Vespasian*, p 152; Miriam Griffin, ‘The Flavians’, in Alan Bowman et al (eds), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 11 (Cambridge, 2000), p 26. Cowan notes that Vespasian had to deal with ‘elements of up to 28 praetorian cohorts’ in this process; see *Aspects of the Severan Field Army*, p 12. At first Vespasian attempted to release all the Vitellian soldiers but he soon realized that it would be better to decide each dismissal on an individual basis. For examples of Vitellian supporters who were promoted to the guard by Vespasian, see *ILS* 2034 (discussed below) and *ILS* 2036 (= Campbell, *The Roman Army*, #63, #62). On the ways in which Vespasian accommodated these soldiers and on their subsequent retirement see L. Keppie, ‘Colonisation and veteran settlement in Italy in the first century AD’, *PBSR* 52 (1984), pp 91–2.

16. Vespasian also offered a reduced donative because of financial restraints; see Chapter 2. On emulation of Augustus, see Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 80; Passerini, *Le Coorti*, p 55.

17. *CIL* 16.81 (a diploma, in which the Xth cohort is mentioned, it dates to the early second century AD).

18. See Chapter 2. Cowan, *Aspects of the Severan Field Army*, p 14, associates the increase with Domitian’s Dacian Wars. Cf. also Durry, *Les Cohortes*, pp 80–1; Le Bohec, *Imperial Roman Army*, p 21; Coulston, ‘Armed and belted men’, p 77.

19. Durry first argued for quingenary cohorts; see *Les Cohortes*, p 86. Among those who support cohorts of 500 are Keppie, ‘The praetorian guard’, p 112; Grant, *The Army of the Caesars*, p 88; Le

Bohec, *Imperial Roman Army*, p 21 (but for criticism of his use of the *Castra Praetoria* in this assessment, see below).

20. This is why Durry turned to the *laterculi praetorianorum* (the register of discharges) in an attempt to calculate the number in each cohort; he concluded from this evidence that the second-century cohorts, at any rate, were quingenary, and that the increase in effective happened under Severus. See Durry, *Les Cohortes*, pp 84–7. His methodology was criticized, however, by Passerini, *Le Coorti*, pp 59–62, and by D.L. Kennedy, ‘Some observations on the praetorian guard’, *Ancient Society* 9 (1979), pp 283–7. See also Cowan, *Aspects of the Severan Field Army*, pp 55–63, for a summary of the methods used by, and for criticisms of, Durry and Kennedy.

21. Chilver, *A Historical Commentary*, p 17.

22. Dio 75.2.4–5; see also Chapter 2. As Chilver, *A Historical Commentary*, p 16, notes: ‘had [Dio] known that Severus was the first to make a praetorian cohort 1,000 strong, he would surely have said so’.

23. Herodian 3.13.4.

24. Whittaker, *Herodian*, p 352, n. 1. Some scholars suggest an increase from 1,000 to 1,500 at this time; see Kennedy, ‘Some observations’, p 288; Coulston, ‘Armed and belted men’, p 77.

25. R.E. Smith, ‘The army reforms’, pp 485–6. The II Parthica clearly is the ‘great army encamped before the city’ in Herodian, despite its distance from the capital.

26. Complaints about the way in which Severus changed the atmosphere of Rome with his reforms of the military are also found in Dio (75.2.5–6), as noted earlier (Chapter 2).

27. Tacitus, *Histories* 2.93.2.

28. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 82, suggested that the subjunctive mood of the verb in this passage (*inessent*) denoted a change in effective, since it marked an exception (‘not only sixteen cohorts, but also each one thousand strong’), but that is an overstatement of the force of the verb. It could be, however, that Tacitus added the clause denoting the effective as a way of reminding the reader that this was a substantial increase (that is, an additional 4,000 men). My thanks to Gavin Kelly for his helpful discussion of this passage.

29. Among those who argue for milliary cohorts from the time of Augustus are T. Mommsen, ‘Die Gardetruppen der römischen Republik und der Kaiserzeit’, *Hermes* 14 (1879), p 30; Passerini, *Le Coorti*, pp

62–5; I.A. Richmond, 'The relation of the praetorian camp to Aurelian's wall of Rome', *PBSR* 10 (1927), p 12; Campbell, *Emperor*, p 162, n. 6. Other interpretations have been offered for the purported Vitellian change: for example, Le Bohec, *Imperial Roman Army*, p 21, argues for a temporary increase from 500 to 1,000, and then a reduction back to 500 under Vespasian. Some propose that the number remained at 1,000 from this time; see Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army*, p 188; Gilliver, 'The Augustan reform', p 196. Scheidel, 'The demography of the Roman imperial army', in his *Measuring Sex, Age and Death in the Roman Empire: Explorations in Ancient Demography* (Ann Arbor, 1996), p 126, n. 95, argues that the cohorts were milliary by the time of the Antonine period. On this see also Cowan, *Aspects of the Severan Field Army*, pp 60–3; Kennedy, 'Some observations', p 287.

30. Although the praetorian cohorts associated with the late republic varied in size, we know that the units could be sizeable. See Chapter 2. The effective of the urban cohorts also is not clear; see Chapter 4.

31. In addition to the praetorian infantry, each cohort had a cavalry unit closely associated with them. The total number of horsemen associated with the guard is not known, but may have been as many as 1,200. On this body see Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 99; Speidel, *Riding for Caesar*, pp 31–3.

32. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 240. As Keppie, 'The praetorian guard', p 117, notes, it was probably easier to recruit men locally. Until the reign of Septimius Severus, there was no system in place whereby service in the guard became a reward for the ordinary soldier from the legions.

33. Purcell, 'Rome and its development', p 793; P.A. Brunt, 'Conscription and volunteering in the Roman imperial army', in his *Roman Imperial Themes* (Oxford, 1990), pp 193–4.

34. Le Bohec, *Imperial Roman Army*, p 99, following Passerini, notes that, at the beginning of the second century, Italians still comprised 89 per cent of recruits for the guard, and by the end of the Antonines, the number had fallen only slightly. For general statistics on the recruitment of praetorians, cf. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, pp 239–57, and Passerini, *Le Coorti*, pp 146–59, where he provides a list of inscriptions from the first two centuries AD of praetorians according to origin, but without specific dates. For recruitment in general (mostly secondcentury evidence) see J. Sašel, 'Zur Rekrutierung der

Prätorianer', *Historia* 21 (1972), pp 474–80; W. Scheidel, 'Inscriptionsstatistik und die Frage des Rekrutierungsalters römischer Soldaten', *Chiron* 22 (1992), pp 281–97, especially p 290.

35. Tacitus, *Annals* 4.5.3.

36. As noted by Keppie, 'The praetorian guard', p 118.

37. Dio 56.23.4. It is difficult to know whether Dio is referring to the guard here or to the German bodyguard, though his language suggests the former.

38. For Macedonia see *CIL* 6.2767 (= *ILS* 2032) and *CIL* 6.2645 (= *ILS* 2030); cf. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, pp 79, 241, 252. An example of a praetorian from Gallia Narbonensis is found in *CIL* 6.2763. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 241, cites Pliny the Elder, *NH* 25.17, as an example of a praetorian from Spain, but the origin is not clear from the context. Passerini, *Le Coorti*, pp 156–9, provides epigraphic evidence for recruits from the provinces; in the first two centuries AD, Macedonia, Noricum and Spain provided the most non-Italian recruits, but the numbers vary widely.

39. For example, Kennedy, 'Some observations', pp 289–94, lists only three transfers of this nature, all of which he dates to AD 69: *CIL* 6.2649 (= *ILS* 2035); *CIL* 6.2558 (= *ILS* 2036; translated in Campbell, *The Roman Army*, #62); *CIL* 6.2725 (= *ILS* 2034; translated in Campbell, *The Roman Army*, #63, discussed below). Keppie, 'Colonisation', p 92, n. 100, adds four other possible candidates. S. Dušanić, 'An early praetorian diploma', *Epigraphica* 55 (1993), pp 9–44, errs in suggesting that the subject of the diploma under discussion – if it even belongs to a praetorian, which is uncertain – had possibly been moved to the guard from his legion by Nero in AD 62 (as Dušanić also argues is the case for *ILS* 2034); both diplomas clearly belong to the civil war period. On diplomas see below.

40. Le Bohec, *Imperial Roman Army*, p 99. For examples of soldiers who were promoted to the guard in this period see *CIL* 6.2437 (= *ILS* 2037; translated in Campbell, *The Roman Army*, #64); *CIL* 6.2758 (translated in Campbell, *The Roman Army*, #65) – both dated to AD 193; *CIL* 6.210 (translated in Campbell, *The Roman Army*, #66) – dated to AD 208. Cowan, *Aspects of the Severan Field Army*, p 16, n. 27, notes that Thracians and Pannonians dominate in the third century.

41. The term of duty for praetorians was 12 years in 14 BC, changing to 16 years in AD 5. Cf. Dio 54.25.6; 55.23.1; Durry, *Les Cohortes*, pp 262–4. Legionary soldiers usually served for 25 years

after the middle of the first century AD.

42. Cowan, *Aspects of the Severan Field Army*, p 46. Furthermore, he has argued convincingly that Severus formally increased the length of service to a minimum of 18 years; see pp 35–47.

43. Scheidel, ‘Demography’, p 111.

44. Campbell, *Emperor*, pp 10, 111. See also E. Birley, ‘Origins of legionary centurionates’, in his *Roman Britain and the Roman Army* (London, 1961), p 122.

45. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, pp 251–7, argues for the praetorians to be of modest birth, while Passerini, *Le Coorti*, pp 159–71, prefers to see these men coming from better-off families.

46. See Scheidel, ‘Demography’, p 111; R.P. Duncan-Jones, ‘Age-rounding, illiteracy and social differentiation in the Roman empire’, *Chiron* 7 (1977), p 338.

47. W. Scheidel, ‘Marriage, family, and survival: demographic aspects’, in P. Erdkamp (ed), *A Companion to the Roman Army* (2007), p 418, argues that the use of the term ‘ban’ is not accurate; he suggests ‘non-recognition’ of marriage is a more appropriate term.

48. Sara Phang, *The Marriage of Roman Soldiers (13 BC – AD 235): Law and Family in the Imperial Army* (Leiden, 2001), pp 160–4. She offers the explanation that ‘the Praetorians’ low “marriage” rate is related to their status as an elite force’. The importance of military diplomas for the praetorians may stem from this restriction; see below.

49. On the hazards of living in Rome see W. Scheidel, ‘Germs for Rome’, in C. Edwards and G. Woolf (eds), *Rome the Cosmopolis* (Cambridge, 2003), pp 158–76; A. Scobie, ‘Slums, sanitation, and mortality in the Roman world’, *Klio* 68 (1986), pp 399–433. Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army*, p 188, notes that ‘residence in the capital’ was an attraction for recruits with the reduced risk of injury or death, but this seems not to be borne out by the demographic evidence (though better medical attention may have alleviated some of the problems). My thanks to April Pudsey for her comments on this debate.

50. Le Bohec, *Imperial Roman Army*, p 58.

51. *CIL* 6.2725 (= *ILS* 2034; translated in Campbell, *The Roman Army*, #63):

C. Vedennius C.f. | Qui. Moderatus Antio, | milit. in leg. XVI Gal. a. X,
| tranlat [*sic*] in coh. IX pr., | in qua milit. ann. VIII, | missus honesta
mission., | revoc. ab imp. fact. evoc. Aug., | arcitect. armament. imp. |

evoc. ann. XXIII, | donis militarib. donat. | bis. ab divo Vesp. et imp. Domitiano Aug. Germ. |

(Gaius Vedennius Moderatus, son of Gaius, of the tribe Quirina, from Antium, soldier in the XVI Gallica for ten years, transferred to the ninth praetorian cohort, in which he served for eight years, honourably discharged, recalled by the emperor and made *evocatus Augusti*, architect of the imperial armoury, *evocatus* for 23 years, awarded military honours twice, by the Divine Vespasian and by the Emperor Domitian Augustus Germanicus.)

52. Vedennius' speciality was in artillery, as is evident from the *ballista* on his tombstone. My thanks to Lawrence Keppie for this information.

53. G. Wesch-Klein, 'Recruits and veterans', in P. Erdkamp (ed), *A Companion to the Roman Army* (Oxford, 2007), p 440.

54. On the importance of funerary inscriptions for soldiers see L. Keppie, "Having been a soldier": The commemoration of military service on funerary monuments of the early Roman empire', in J.J. Wilkes (ed), *Documenting the Roman Army: Essays in Honour of Margaret Roxan* (London, 2003), pp 31–49; J. Coulston, 'Art, culture and service: the depiction of soldiers on funerary monuments of the 3rd century AD', in L. de Blois and E. Lo Cascio (eds), *The Impact of the Roman Army (200 BC–AD 476): Economic, Social, Political, Religious and Cultural Aspects* (Leiden, 2007), pp 529–61. For details on funerary inscriptions of the guard in and around Rome see Scheidel, 'Demography', pp 111–16; N. Latteri, 'La statio dei pretoriani al III miglio dell'Appia antica e il loro sepolcreto "ad catacumbas"', *MEFRA* 114.2 (2002), pp 534–44; Cowan, *Aspects of the Severan Field Army*, passim. On the relationship between the soldier and the person setting up the stone at Rome see D. Noy, *Foreigners at Rome: Citizens and Strangers* (London, 2000), pp 68–71. For an example, see Figure 8.

55. For careers of those below the centurionate see D.J. Breeze, 'The career structure below the centurionate', *ANRW* II.1 (1974), pp 435–9; Durry, *Les Cohortes*, pp 101–26; he also provides a chart on p 191 listing positions for careers at all levels.

56. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 301.

57. Just such an award is detailed in the earliest extant diploma for a praetorian (*CIL* 16.25), dated to the reign of Vespasian; see below. The grant provides exemption from taxation as well; it is hard not to see this additional privilege as related to the settlement after the civil

war of AD 69.

58. Keppie, 'The praetorian guard', p 117 (on the foundation of Aosta in 25 BC). It has been suggested that providing land to those completing their service meant the treasury need not provide the *praemia militiae* (a sum of money provided on retirement), thus resulting in savings; see S. Ferjančić, 'Veterans of the praetorian guard in the central Balkan provinces', *Zbornik Matice srpske za klasične studije* 11 (2009), p 114.

59. For examples from each of these groups – those that stayed in Rome, those that went to the provinces and those that returned to their place of origin – see Durry, *Les Cohortes*, pp 301–2, with notes. For details on some who settled in the Balkan area (though not all were from there) see Ferjančić, 'Veterans', pp 114–17. Dušanić's soldier, if indeed a praetorian, seems to have retired to Spain; see 'An early praetorian diploma', p 24. For examples from the first century see Keppie, 'Colonisation', *passim*.

60. Ferjančić, 'Veterans', p 118. See Wesch-Klein, 'Recruits and veterans', pp 447–9 on the legions; given the status of soldiers from the guard, they must have been valued in their communities upon their return.

61. On diplomas in general see Le Bohec, *Imperial Roman Army*, pp 221–3.

62. Praetorians who settled in areas where they might marry non-citizen women would have had particular need of these documents. In addition to the praetorians and auxiliaries, those who received diplomas upon completion of service included members of the fleet, of the urban cohorts and occasionally legionary soldiers. For a different interpretation of these documents (that all were special grants) see S. Dušanić, 'Pre-Severan diplomata and the problem of "special grants"', in W. Eck and H. Wolff (eds), *Heer und Integrationspolitik: Die römischen Militärdiplome als historische Quelle* (Köln, 1986), pp 190–240.

63. *CIL* 16.25. There is appended only part of the name of a soldier from the second praetorian cohort.

64. *nomina speculatorum qui in praetorio meo militaverunt item militum | qui in cohortibus novem praetoriis et quattuor urbanis subieci*. *CIL* 16.21 (= *ILS* 1993; translated in Campbell, *The Roman Army*, #327). Campbell, *Emperor*, p 111, notes that it is only on praetorian diplomas that the first person is used of the emperor ('I have granted'); on others the third person is used. On the importance of this

wording see Chapter 2.

65. Calculated from the table in P. Holder, *Roman Military Diplomas* V (London, 2006), pp 681–98. An example of a third-century diploma (dating to AD 246) is shown in Figure 9.

66. Le Bohec, *Imperial Roman Army*, p 223. The impetus might have come from soldiers transferred from the legions to the guard in this period who had to be discharged by Vespasian and who would want some compensation in return. See M.-P. Arnaud-Lindet, ‘Remarques sur l’octroi de la civitas et du conubium dans les diplômes militaires’, *REL* 55 (1977), pp 305–8.

67. Holder, *Diplomas* V, lists 72 diplomas for praetorians post AD 193. The last grant comes in AD 306.

68. On the prefecture see Chapter 2.

69. Brunt, ‘Princeps and equites’, p 59.

70. Cf. Campbell, *Emperor*, p 105; Saller, *Personal Patronage*, pp 42, 158; Millar, *The Emperor*, pp 276, 285.

71. Tacitus, *Annals* 4.2.2.

72. Tacitus, *Annals* 12.41.2; Barrett, *Agrippina*, pp 118–21.

73. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 143. For an exception to this see below on Naso. Speidel, *Riding for Caesar*, p 99, notes that *primipilares* were ‘the most tried and trusted men in the emperors’ service’.

74. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 143. There are many variations on this career path, for example, omitting the tribunate of the *vigiles*; most often this was because of exceptional circumstances. See, for example, *CIL* 10.4872 (= *ILS* 2021) in which Lucius Ovinus Rufus went directly from the primipilate of a legion to be tribune of the XI urban cohort before moving on to the tribunate of the III praetorian cohort; the date is Augustan.

75. On the duties of the tribunes in the legions see Le Bohec, *Imperial Roman Army*, pp 37–9.

76. *Digest* 49.16.12.2; noted by Speidel, *Riding for Caesar*, p 95.

77. All other posts were under the supervision of the *cornicularius*, who usually had served for eight years. See Durry, *Les Cohortes*, pp 93–9, 191; Le Bohec, *Imperial Roman Army*, pp 54–5.

78. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 133; B. Dobson and D.J. Breeze, ‘The Rome cohorts and the legionary centurionate’, *Epigraphische Studien* 8 (1969), pp 106–10.

79. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 134. It also was possible for a praetorian

soldier to advance to a legionary centurionate at this point rather than to stay in the city cohorts; see Dobson and Breeze, 'The Rome cohorts', pp 105–6.

80. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 137. The term *trecenarius* is difficult to translate; see Passerini, *Le Coorti*, pp 89–96; Dobson and Breeze, 'The Rome cohorts', pp 118–19. J.C. Mann, 'Trecenarius', *ZPE* 52 (1983), pp 136–40, offers another suggestion – that the term is an indication of rank rather than an official title.

81. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 136. Dobson and Breeze, 'The Rome cohorts', p 119.

82. Breeze, 'The career structure', p 437. See, for example, the career of Aulus Saufeius Emax, a soldier of the IXth praetorian cohort promoted to *tesserarius* (*CIL* 3.2887 = *ILS* 9067; translated in Campbell, *The Roman Army*, #67):

A. Saufeius P. f. Ca[m. . .] | max. Ansio miles c[oh.] | VIII pr. (centuria) Firmi Ter[tulli], | militavit annis . . . , [bene] | ficiarius t[rib., tes]erarius, co[rnicular.], | donis do[natus ab] | imperat[ore] no Cae[sar Aug. tor]quib[us] . . .

(Aulus Saufeius Emax, son of Publius, of the tribe Camilia, from Ansium (?), soldier of the ninth praetorian cohort, century of Firmus Tertullus, served [. . .] years, clerk of a tribune, officer of the watchword, senior clerk, awarded honours by the Emperor [. . .] Caesar Augustus, with necklaces ...)

Cf. also the epitaph of Gaius Lucilius Vindex from the VIth praetorian cohort who was clerk of a tribune (*beneficiarius*) and then became an *optio* in a century (*CIL* 9.5809 = *ILS* 2078; translated in Campbell, *The Roman Army*, #69).

83. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 139.

84. Dobson and Breeze, 'The Rome cohorts', p 110, note that 'The transfer to the Rome centurionates ... was a special favour which would require the consent of the emperor, and men who could obtain this favour would also be able to turn the opportunity of service in Rome to good use.'

85. For Chaerea see Chapter 2.

86. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.67.2–3, especially 67.2, Tacitus' speech by one of the tribunes, Subrius Flavus, on why he joined the plot; 68.1. See also Dio 62.24.2; Suetonius, *Nero* 36.2.

87. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.65.1.

88. Rufus had been made prefect of the grain supply in AD 55; his appointment to that post is connected to Agrippina. See Tacitus, *Annals* 14.51.3, where he is described as being popular with both the populace and the soldiers. This reputation may have been the result of the diligence with which he had carried out his duties when in charge of the grain supply, if a reference to Faenian granaries (*CIL* 6.37796) belongs to him.

89. Tigellinus had been appointed prefect along with Rufus on the death of Burrus in AD 62. He previously had been the prefect of the *vigiles*, though the date of his appointment is not certain. On Tigellinus see Demougin, *Prosopographie* #651; Griffin, *Nero*, pp 103–4.

90. Tacitus, *Annals* 14.57.1; cf. also Dio 62.13.3. The sources make it clear that Nero relied more on Tigellinus: he was involved in the persecution of Octavia (AD 62) and provided an elaborate banquet for Nero's enjoyment (AD 64), but there is no mention of Rufus in these years. See Tacitus, *Annals* 14.60.5, 64.1, 15.37; Suetonius, *Nero* 35.2; Dio 62.15.1–6.

91. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.59.1.

92. *Ibid.*, 15.49.2, 50.4, 51.1–4, 54–56, 57.1–2. See also Dio 62.27.3.

93. It is not clear where these extra troops came from; Tacitus simply mentions that there were Germans among them. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.58.1–2.

94. *Ibid.*, 15.59.4–5.

95. *Ibid.*, 15.58.3–4; Rudich, *Political Dissidence*, p 117.

96. The seven tribunes were: Pompeius (praenomen and cognomen unknown); Cornelius Martialis; Flavius Nepos; Statius Domitius (all of whom were demoted); Gavius Silvanus; Statius Proxumus (both of whom committed suicide); and Subrius Flavus (who was murdered). Cf. Demougin, *Prosopographie*, p 480.

97. They were Veianius Niger and Gerellanus; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.67.4, 69.1. E. Koestermann, *Cornelius Tacitus, Annalen*, vol. 4 (Heidelberg, 1965), p 322, notes that the four who were demoted were not listed in Tacitus as being involved in the plot. It may have been that Nero was uncertain whom he could trust and preferred to remove any officers that had the least suspicion attached to them.

98. In addition to those already mentioned, Rufius Crispinus, praetorian prefect under Claudius who had been removed by Agrippina in AD 51, was exiled to Sardinia after the conspiracy.

Tacitus, *Annals* 15.71.4, suggests that the reason for this was Nero's animosity towards Crispinus, perhaps connected with his earlier marriage to Poppaea, now Nero's wife. Crispinus committed suicide a year later on the orders of Nero; see Tacitus, *Annals* 16.17.1–2.

99. Koestermann, *Cornelius Tacitus*, vol. 4, p 322, argues that it was the 'incompetence and inactivity' of Faenius Rufus that accounts for the failure of the conspiracy. See also Rudich, *Political Dissidence*, p 118.

100. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.72.1; cf. Dio 62.27.4; Suetonius, *Nero* 10.1. The grant of grain seems to have been intended not just for this one occasion but as a permanent concession. For a different interpretation of this grant see Barrett, *Agrippina*, p 173.

101. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.72.1; cf. also Suetonius, *Nero* 15.2; Dio 62.27.4. According to Suetonius (*Otho* 1.3), it was a very rare honour for a statue on the Palatine to be granted to an individual outside the imperial family. The last praetorian prefect to have been granted such an honour was Sejanus.

102. Suetonius, *Tiberius* 60.

103. Suetonius, *Claudius* 21.3. See Chapter 4.

104. Similis: Dio 69.19; Plautianus: Dio 76.14.3. The examples tend to cluster in the first century AD for which there are more complete sources.

105. See, for example, Le Bohec, *Imperial Roman Army*, p 45 ('the soldier started with three officer appointments in the garrison at Rome, then became a centurion in a legion and in the three urban corps, then a *primuspilus* and returned once more to the capital for a triple tribuneship which could lead to procuratorships'). See also Keppie, 'The praetorian guard', p 113 (who dates such careers back to Claudius' reign).

106. On the career path in the second century see Dobson and Breeze, 'The Rome cohorts', pp 101–32. For the tribunates of the guard see B. Dobson, 'The significance of the centurion and *primipilaris* in the Roman army and administration', *ANRW* II.1 (1974), p 418. It is not clear how long each post was held; Dobson and Breeze, 'The Rome cohorts', p 107, note that '[t]he Rome centurionates, as they are held in different units with a fixed relationship to one another, represent promotions as well as transfers, but again there is no fixed period of tenure of each post, and the temptation to think of a rapid transit must be resisted'.

107. *CIL* 11.5646 (= *ILS* 2081; translated in Campbell, *The Roman Army* #91):

C. Arrio C. f. Corn. | Clementi militi coh. IX | pr., equiti coh. eiusdem, donis | donato ab imp. Traiano | torquibus armillis phaleris | ob bellum Dacicum, singulari | pr[a]efectorum pr., tesserario, op | tioni, fisci curator, cornicul. | tribuni, evocato Aug., (centurioni) coh. I vigil., (centurioni) | statorum, (centurioni) coh. XIII urb., (centurioni) coh. VII pr., | trecentario, donis donato ab. imp. | Hadriano hasta pura corona aurea, | (centurioni) leg. III Aug., primipilari, Ilviro quin | quennali, patrono municipi, | curator rei publicae, | decur. et Aug. V[I vir.] municipes Matil.

(To Gaius Arrius Clemens, son of Gaius, of the tribe Cornelia, soldier of the ninth praetorian cohort, mounted soldier of the same cohort, awarded honours by the Emperor Trajan with necklaces, with armbands and with ornaments for performance in the Dacian War, aide of the praetorian prefects, officer of the watchword, orderly, clerk in charge of the treasury, senior clerk of a tribune, *evocatus Augusti*, centurion of the first cohort of the *vigiles*, centurion of the imperial messengers, centurion of the fourteenth urban cohort, centurion of the seventh praetorian cohort, senior centurion, awarded honours by the Emperor Hadrian with an untipped spear and golden crown, centurion of the III Augusta, chief centurion, member of the board of two for five years, patron of the municipality, curator of the community; the town councillors, the board of six Augustales, and the citizens of the municipality of Matilica [erected this monument].)

Campbell notes that this career is ‘fairly typical of the more elaborate second-century pattern of promotion to the centurionate from the guard’.

108. For discussion of such careers see Birley, ‘Origins of legionary centurionates’, pp 118–22.

109. *CIL* 3.14387 (= *ILS* 9199; translated in Campbell, *The Roman Army*, #95):

[L.] Antonio M. f. Fab. Nasoni |
 [(centurioni) le] g. III Cyrenaicae |
 [(centurioni) le] g. XIII Geminae, |
 [honorat]o albata decursione ab imp., |
 [prae]f. civitatis Colaphianorum, |
 [primo] pilo leg. XIII Gem., | trib.
 leg. I Italic., | [trib. coh.] IIII vigilum,
 | trib. coh. XV urban | [trib. coh.]
 XI urban., | trib. coh. IX prae[t. | donato]
 ab imperator[e Nerone co]ron. [valla]ri,
 corona au[rea] | vexillis [duob]us, ha[stis puris]
 du[a] bus | [primo pilo bis le] g. XIV Gem.,
 | [trib. coh.] I praet., | et pra[ep]osito
 supra | [vetera]nos Romae m[o]rantium
 [pluriu]m exercituum, | proc. Aug. [Po]nto et B[ithyni]ae
 (To [Lucius] Antonius Naso, son of Marcus, of the tribe Fabia,
 [centurion] of the III Cyrenaica, [centurion] of the XIII Gemina,
 honoured by the emperor in the white drill (?), [prefect?] of the
 district of the Colapiani, [chief] centurion of the XIII Gemina, tribune
 of the I Italica, [tribune] of the fourth cohort of the *vigiles*, tribune of
 the fifteenth urban cohort, [tribune] of the eleventh urban cohort,
 tribune of the ninth praetorian cohort, awarded honours by the
 Emperor Nero with a rampart crown, a golden crown, two standards,
 and two untipped spears, [chief centurion for a second time?] of the
 XIV Gemina, [tribune] of the first praetorian cohort and put in charge
 of the veterans of numerous armies staying in Rome, procurator of the
 Emperor in Pontus and Bithynia ...)

110. For example, he is listed as one of the tribunes cashiered by Galba; see Tacitus, *Histories* 1.20.

111. On this appointment, see Keppie, 'Colonisation', pp 92–3. He postulates that Naso held the tribunate of the guard as well as the command over the veterans concurrently.

112. For example, Keppie, 'The praetorian guard', p 114: 'The standard sequence, of the three city-based tribunates held in due order, is in place under Nero, as exemplified by the careers of such officers as M. Vettius Valens, C. Gavius Silvanus and L. Antonius Naso.' One other first-century example is Lucius Tatinius Cnosos (*AE*

1933, 87). But it must be noted that these are the only examples we have, and therefore it is dangerous to draw any firm conclusions from such a small sample.

113. *CIL* 11.395 (= *ILS* 2648; translated in Campbell, *The Roman Army*, #90).

114. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 133, however, refers to Vettius Valens' career as 'un curriculum typique', though this is challenged by Dobson and Breeze, 'The Rome cohorts', p 107 ('Vettius Valens is anything but typical').

115. Dio 53.11.5. My thanks to Calum Maciver for his helpful discussion of this passage.

116. Millar, *The Emperor*, p 59, notes that there is 'some acerbity' in Dio's comment; Dio's attitude to the praetorians is coloured by his experience under Septimius Severus, something which I intend to pursue elsewhere.

117. On the duties of the guard see Chapter 4. It has been argued that part of the reason for the increased rate of pay may have been to offset the cost of purchasing their own food in the markets at Rome, at least before the reign of Nero, when the grant of grain was given. See P.A. Brunt, 'Pay and superannuation in the Roman army', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 18 (1950), p 53, with n. 21.

118. For an overview of the problem of pay rates for the army in general see R. Alston, 'Roman military pay from Caesar to Diocletian', *JRS* 84 (1994), pp 113–23; Watson, *Roman Soldier*, pp 97–9.

119. Brunt, *Pay and Superannuation*, p 51, points out that the term 'double' is not necessarily exact and can account for a wide range of possibilities.

120. Tacitus, *Annals* 1.17.6.

121. Dio 55.23.1. This amount was increased by Caracalla for the guard in the early third century, but it is unclear by how much because the text is corrupt at that point; see Dio 78.24.1.

122. Tacitus, *Annals* 1.8.2; Suetonius, *Augustus* 101; Dio 56.32.2. Keppie, based on this evidence, argued that the pay for both urban and praetorian cohorts was the same until sometime between AD 6 and 14, at which point the pay for the praetorians was doubled. See 'The praetorian guard', p 110.

123. See, for example, Watson, *Roman Soldier*, pp 97–8.

124. Le Bohec, *Imperial Roman Army*, p 210.

125. Dio's claim that the grant of the higher rate of pay was approved by the senate is important, for it indicates that the emperor's personal bodyguard was seen as an accepted part of the principate. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 77, comments that the act 'sanctioned' the existence of the guard. Cf. also Campbell, *The Emperor*, p 110.

126. Suetonius, *Domitian* 7.3. The date was AD 84. Numismatic evidence supports the text; see Speidel, 'Roman army pay scales', p 87, n. 1.

127. Le Bohec, *Imperial Roman Army*, pp 209–10.

128. Herodian 3.8.5.

129. Dio 79.36.2. For details on the possible rates of increase see R. Develin, 'The army pay rises under Severus and Caracalla and the question of the *annona militaris*', *Latomus* 30 (1971), pp 687–95.

130. Tacitus, *Annals* 1.2.1: *militem donis ... pellexit*.

131. For the grant to the veterans see *Res Gestae* 15.3. On the grant for Gaius' appearance see Dio 55.6.4. It may be that Tacitus was referring to the land grants established under Augustus; see F.D.R. Goodyear, *The Annals of Tacitus*, vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1972), p 104.

132. On donatives in general see Passerini, *Le Coorti*, pp 114–23; Watson, *Roman Soldier*, pp 109–10. Le Bohec, *Imperial Roman Army*, pp 214–17, provides a chart listing all donatives granted to the army in the imperial period, while Menéndez Argüín lists those for the praetorians only; see *Pretorianos*, pp 155–6.

133. Sejanus: Suetonius, *Tiberius* 48.4; Claudius: Dio 60.12.4; Agrippina: Dio 61.14.3. Pisonian Conspiracy: Tacitus, *Annals* 15.72.1; Dio 62.27.4.

134. Domitian: Dio 67.7.3.

135. Severus: Dio 77.1.1; Caracalla: Herodian 4.4.7, 4.5.1.

136. A detailed examination of the camp is provided by Menéndez Argüín, *Pretorianos*, pp 57–72.

137. Tacitus, *Annals* 4.2.1: *vim praefecturae modicam antea intendit, dispersas per urbem cohortis una in castra conducendo, ut simul imperia acciperent numeroque et robore et visu inter se fiducia ipsis, in ceteros metus oreretur*.

138. Suetonius, *Augustus* 49.1: *neque tamen umquam plures quam tres cohortes in urbe esse passus est easque sine castris, reliquas in hiberna et aestiva circa finitima oppida dimittere assuerat*. Cf. also *Tiberius* 37.1 (where Suetonius records the building of the camp for the praetorian

cohorts that were previously ‘scattered and billeted out’); on the context of this passage (namely that it was part of an enumeration of security measures undertaken by Tiberius) see Rivi re, ‘Les batailles’, p 64.

139. Both Aquileia and Ostia have been proposed as possible sites, but the evidence is tenuous. See Durry, *Les Cohortes*, pp 44–5; Keppie, ‘The praetorian guard’, pp 115–16.

140. Webster, *Roman Imperial Army*, p 45. Cf. also Campbell, *Emperor*, p 111.

141. Grant, *The Army of the Caesars*, p 89.

142. It is possible, of course, that the cohorts referred to by Suetonius (*tres cohortes*, no specific designation) are the urban cohorts and that all of the praetorian cohorts were billeted outside of the capital before AD 23. Keppie, ‘The praetorian guard’, p 116, notes that there is little epigraphic evidence of the guard in Rome during the Augustan period, but this does not mean that praetorians were not in the capital at this time and there are several examples of them being involved in activities in the city throughout Augustus’ reign; as a result, it would be more convenient to have at least some of the praetorians situated in Rome. On their duties in this period see Chapter 4.

143. The date of Strabo’s appointment as prefect is not known, but at the accession of Tiberius, he is recorded in Tacitus (*Annals* 1.7.2) as taking the oath after the two consuls and before the prefect of the grain supply; there is no record of a colleague in the prefecture and it is assumed that he was sole praetorian prefect at that point.

144. Cf. B. Levick, *Tiberius* (London, 1976), p 73. For the mutiny see Chapter 4. Sejanus had been involved in military affairs prior to this assignment. Tacitus, *Annals* 4.1.2, places him in the group that accompanied Gaius Caesar to the east in 1 BC; Velleius Paterculus also accompanied Gaius east, but does not mention Sejanus in his description of events. Cf. *History of Rome* 2.101–3. For Sejanus’ family connections see A.R. Birley, ‘Sejanus: his fall’, in N. Sekunda (ed.), *Corolla Cosmo Rodewald* (Gda nsk, 2007), pp 123–6.

145. Strabo had apparently been appointed prefect of Egypt; see Stein, *Die Praefekten*, pp 24–5. The exact date of his tenure is uncertain, but Stein believes Strabo died in office. Cf. Pliny the Elder, *NH* 36.197. The appointment itself is only tentatively accepted by Levick, *Tiberius*, p 273, n. 60, and is challenged by D. Hennig, *L. Aelius*

Sejanus, Untersuchungen zur Regierung des Tiberius (Munich, 1975), pp 7–8.

146. See Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome* 2.127.1, where this comparison is made. Woodman, however, interprets this section of Velleius' work as an attempt 'to counter contemporary criticism of Tiberius', rather than as any defence of Sejanus; see A.J. Woodman, *Velleius Paterculus: The Tiberian Narrative (2.41–131)* (Cambridge, 1977), p 247. Be that as it may, the comparison still must have been apt for Velleius to have noted it for his readers.

147. The date of this honour is either AD 19 or 20 and Sejanus was the first equestrian to receive it. There were also other honours in this period, for example, the betrothal of Sejanus' daughter to Claudius' son, which brought about a close connection to the imperial family. See Tacitus, *Annals* 3.35.1.

148. Dio 58.4.2–4. Cf also Suetonius, *Tiberius* 65.1. Syme, *Augustan Aristocracy*, p 311, refers to this appointment as a 'startling and flagrant anomaly'.

149. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 364; Passerini, *Le Coorti*, pp 277–8.

150. Hennig, *L. Aelius Sejanus*, pp 144–55. This may have been Macro, who would play a pivotal role in Sejanus' fall later that same year; see Chapter 4.

151. Tacitus, *Annals* 4.2.1. As Syme has noted, this is to allow him to include the first mention of the camp in his general assessment of Sejanus at the beginning of Book 4. See Syme, *Tacitus*, p 424. Nevertheless, this date is accepted by Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 45.

152. Dio 57.19.6. It should be noted that Suetonius does not mention Sejanus in connection with the construction of the camp; cf. Suetonius, *Tiberius* 37.1. Coulston, 'Armed and belted men', p 101, n. 28, questions whether the camp was indeed Sejanus' idea 'carried through for the reasons posited in the hostile ancient sources, or a ploy to distance the emperor from a potentially unpopular innovation'. One need not believe the reasons given in the sources, but still accept that the construction was the responsibility of Sejanus.

153. Tacitus, *Annals* 4.2.1: *ut simul imperia acciperent numeroque et robore et visu inter se fiducia ipsis, in ceteros metus oreretur.*

154. This is seen especially in the use of the word 'alleged' (*praetendebat*) by Tacitus in the sentence that follows the rationale for the camp: '[Sejanus] alleged that the soldiers were disorderly when scattered, that if anything came up suddenly they could be of greater

assistance if they could act together; and that they would conduct themselves more austere if the camp was placed far from the attractions of the city' (*praetendebat lascivire militem diductum; si quid subitum ingruat, maiore auxilio pariter subveniri; et severius acturos si vallum statuatur procul urbis inlecebris*). This idea – of Sejanus desiring the control of Rome – is accepted by many scholars, including Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 152; Passerini, *Le Coorti*, p 52; Erhard Meissner, *Sejan, Tiberius und die Nachfolge im Prinzipat* (Erlangen, 1968), p 5, but recent assessments are more measured (e.g. Wiedemann, *Tiberius to Nero*, p 213).

155. Levick, *Tiberius*, p 121, notes that fear of disturbances in Rome against Tiberius may have been a catalyst as well, yet the cohorts already in place in the city should have been sufficient to counter any trouble.

156. On the problem of discipline see Campbell, *Emperor*, p 251, and Speidel, *Riding for Caesar*, pp 95–6. Tacitus himself notes that the billeting of Vitellius' troops throughout Rome in AD 69 caused problems, since it was difficult to train and maintain discipline; see Tacitus, *Histories* 2.93. Such a situation could have occurred with the guard as well in the early principate.

157. As Gilliver, 'The Augustan reform', p 196, has noted, the construction of the camp was 'an overt statement about the nature of imperial rule that Augustus in his guise as restorer of the republic could not have afforded'. See also Keppie, 'The praetorian guard', p 122.

158. See, for example, Ernest Nash, *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (New York, 1961), p 221; S.B. Platner and T. Ashby, *Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Rome, 1965), p 106; L. Richardson, *A New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome* (Baltimore, 1992), pp 78–9; Le Bohec, *Imperial Roman Army*, p 23.

159. A standardized plan for legionary fortresses only was beginning to be developed in the first century AD, but even so, the design of the *Castra Praetoria* had no obvious precedent. For the development of the fortress plan see A. Johnson, *Roman Forts of the 1st and 2nd Centuries AD in Britain and the German Provinces* (London, 1983), pp 222–90. See also Norbert Hanel, 'Military camps, *canabae*, and *vici*. The archaeological evidence', in P. Erdkamp (ed), *A Companion to the Roman Army* (2007), pp 401–7.

160. Pliny the Elder, *NH* 3.67, refers to the camp as being at the 'outer edge of the city' (*ad extrema tectorum*). For location see Figure

10. It has been noted that the main road of the Viminal led from the camp through to the Forum; cf. Busch, '*Militia in urbe*', p 320; F. Coarelli (trans J. Clauss and Daniel Harmon), *Rome and Environs: An Archaeological Guide* (Berkeley, 2007), figure 59.15.

161. Richmond, 'The relation of the praetorian camp', pp 12–22, provides a comprehensive discussion on the nature of the circuit wall and its chronology. See also Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, pp 19–20.

162. In terms of size, the circuit wall of the camp measures approximately 440 by 380 metres and encloses 16.72 hectares, comparatively small in relation to the average legionary fortress, which typically encloses around 20 to 25 hectares, on which see Johnson, *Roman Forts*, p 31.

163. M.E. Blake, *Roman Construction in Italy from Tiberius through the Flavians* (Washington, 1959), p 14. Busch, '*Militia in urbe*', p 330, notes that this 'new and very modern method' corresponded well with the function of the camp (to strengthen discipline) and contrasted with the marble structures in the city.

164. See Richmond, 'The relation of the praetorian camp', plate VIII.

165. A degree of architectural elaboration, achieved through a decorative patterning of masonry, is evident on both gates and they have been described as the translation into brick and concrete of a triumphal arch. See Blake, *Roman Construction*, p 15. The enhanced decoration was fitting for the elite units housed within.

166. Busch, '*Militia in urbe*', p 328, with n. 42, notes that other camps located in civilian settlements had ditches, using the example of the Cripplegate fort in London. The *Castra Praetoria* was attacked at least twice in its history, in AD 69 and 238; see Chapter 2. In his examination of the phasing of the surviving portions of the circuit, Richmond, 'The relation of the praetorian camp', p 22, noted three main periods of repair and alterations prior to the camp's incorporation in the city's defences; two of these have been linked directly with these historic assaults.

167. Random finds from as far back as 1870 relating to the camp have been compiled in the *Carta Archaeologica di Roma, Tavola III* (Florence, 1977), while large-scale salvage works in the 1980s are summarized briefly in M.L. Sementilli and L. Cecilia, '*Castra Praetoria*', *Bulletino della Commissione Archaeologica Comunale di Roma* 91.2 (1986), pp 366–9.

168. The well-preserved late first-century AD camp at Inchtuthil illustrates how design was being codified at this time; see L.F. Pitts and J.K. St Joseph, *Inchtuthil. The Roman Legionary Fortress* (London, 1985).

169. It has been suspected by some scholars that these barracks constitute a later addition to the Tiberian camp undertaken to accommodate an increase in the guard's numbers; see, for example, Coulston, 'Armed and belted men', p 82; Keppie, 'The praetorian guard', p 112. But while excavation has shown that there was renovation in the interior of the camp at a later period, there is nothing to suggest that the two-storey barrack blocks were not original to the Tiberian construction. In fact, the nature of the camp's excavations make any arguments about the date of most of the building remains tricky (for the exception see below).

170. For example, the *principia* of the Claudian fortresses at Vindonissa and Vetera measured 14,400 and 11,400 square metres respectively, while 6,000–9,000 square metres appears to have been more typical. See Pitts and St Joseph, *Inchtuthil*, p 86, for a discussion on comparative *principia* sizes. For a comparison between the Castra Praetoria and the legionary fortress at Novaesium in Germany see Figure 12.

171. See Sablayrolles, 'La rue', p 139, on the importance of the route between camp and palace. See Figure 10.

172. Cecilia, 'Castra Praetoria', p 368.

173. These structures include the Shrine of the Standards (Herodian 4.4.5; 5.8.5–7), a temple to Mars (*CIL* 6.2256 = *ILS* 2090), and an altar to Fortuna Restitutrix (*CIL* 6.30876). On inscriptions devoted to gods associated with the camp see E. Lissi Caronna, 'Castra Praetoria', in E. Steinby (ed), *Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae*, vol. 1, A–C (Rome, 1993), p 252. On the praetorians and religion see Durry, *Les Cohortes*, pp 307–58.

174. *Praetoria* of the first century AD range from 800 square metres to 5,184 square metres; see Pitts and St Joseph, *Inchtuthil*, p 188.

175. The same theory also applies to the tribunes; they, too, were of sufficient status to be able to take advantage of urban life. In that case, the centurions would have been the highest-ranking officers who were resident in the camp, though perhaps on a rotating basis.

176. Literary evidence suggests that the praetorians made use of the baths in the city. Herod Agrippa, imprisoned in the Castra

Praetoria during the reign of Tiberius, was said to be on his way to the baths when news of the emperor's death reached him (Josephus, *AJ* 18.228–33). The location of the prison is not known.

177. For example, among Julio-Claudian fortresses, hospitals ranged from 3,520 to 6,890 square metres. See Pitts and St Joseph, *Inchtuthil*, p 93. Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p 247, attributes a hospital to the camp, along with the *praetorium*, but as has been noted, there is no evidence for either.

178. Tacitus, *Histories* 1.38, 80 (on which see Chapter 2); *CIL* 6.999 (= *ILS* 333); 6. 2725 (= *ILS* 2034; translated in Campbell, *The Roman Army*, #63, discussed above).

179. The *Carta Archaeologica di Roma, Tavola III*, identifies this building as a granary, as does Lissi Caronna, 'Castra Praetoria', p 253. But the remains, consisting of eight large vaulted cells entered by a staircase from the east, bear little resemblance to military granaries of which numerous examples exist. Military architects were concerned with keeping grain dry and well ventilated; storing it underground, even with a cavity wall, would defeat this purpose. Moreover, the means of access, via a stairway and narrow passage, does not suggest the storage of bulk materials that typically were off-loaded on elevated platforms from carts. One also could question the logic of stockpiling grain when so close to the capital; as Keppie, 'The praetorian guard', p 112, notes, 'food-stocks must have been readily obtainable in the adjacent city'.

180. Lissi Caronna, 'Castra Praetoria', pp 252–3. The use of this technique indicates that this is an original feature; see Blake, *Roman Construction*, p 15.

181. Coarelli, *Rome and Environs*, p 247. Richmond, 'The relation of the praetorian camp', figure 1.

182. See D. Davison, *The Barracks of the Roman Army from the 1st to 3rd Centuries A.D.* (Oxford, 1989) on the nature of legionary barracks.

183. Another spatial economy evident in all of the *contubernia* identified in the camp is that they lack the large storage vestibule that is always found in legionary examples. This omission can be explained by the fact that the praetorians would not be expected to maintain an extensive field kit because of the specialized nature of their duties. Coulston, 'Armed and belted men', p 82, argues that there may have been store rooms on the ground floor of the multi-storey barracks, with *contubernia* on the upper levels, but it is not clear that such

storage areas were needed.

184. Le Bohec, *Imperial Roman Army*, p 21. Keppie, 'The praetorian guard', p 112, comes to the same conclusion. On the other hand, Kennedy, 'Some observations', p 287, uses the same evidence to argue for milliary cohorts, at least from the second century.

185. This total is derived as follows: the best-preserved single-storey barrack contains at least 32 *contubernia* (the more elaborate arrangement of smaller rooms displayed at the ends of several of the barrack blocks probably should be interpreted as officer's quarters, which would follow the standard military pattern). At eight men per room, as was the norm, each block would house approximately 260 soldiers. From what has been excavated thus far, there is enough physical evidence to suggest that there were at least 30 of these barrack blocks, allowing for a total of 7,800 men. The four shorter barrack blocks in the southeast corner of the camp would hold approximately 204 men each, making a total of 816 soldiers. The remains of the two-storey barracks revealed at least 104 *contubernia* per floor; if one postulates another similar group to the west of these, which space would allow, the total number that could be housed within would be 3,328 men. Those sections of the wall that have survived show that there were 82 cells in the north wall and 87 in the east wall. Given an equal number in the south and west walls, with nine more in each of the corners, the total number of *contubernia* within the walls would be 347, providing further accommodation for 2,776 men. My thanks to Stephen Copp for his help with these calculations.

186. Rankov, *The Praetorian Guard*; G. Sumner, *Roman Military Clothing*, vol. 1 (London, 2002); *Roman Military Clothing*, vol. 2 (London, 2003); M. Bishop and J. Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment from the Punic Wars to the Fall of Rome* (Oxford, 2006). See also Cowan, *Aspects of the Severan Field Army*, pp 110–34; A. Raúl Menéndez Argüín, 'La guardia pretoriana en combate. I: equipamiento', *Habis* 41 (2010), pp 241–61; H. Ceñal Martínez, 'Uso del arco en las cohortes pretorianas', *Gladius* 31 (2011), pp 77–82 (my thanks to Eberhard Sauer for the last two references).

187. For perhaps the most famous image of the guard from this period see Figure 13.

188. Private monuments, on the other hand, are more numerous. For their design see Busch, '*Militia in urbe*', pp 332–8; Coulston, 'Armed and belted men', pp 94–5.

189. On the problem of identifying soldiers on these monuments see, for example, Charles, 'Trajan's guard', pp 476–89; Coulston, 'Armed and belted men', pp 98–9 (on the Great Trajanic Frieze). That there was separate armour for praetorians and legionaries in the first century is implied by Tacitus in his account of Otho's coup in AD 69: the armoury was opened and the soldiers took whatever armour they could, 'without distinction between praetorian and legionary'. See *Histories* 1.38.3: *rapta statim arma sine mora et ordine militiae, ut praetorianus aut legionarius insignibus suis distingueretur ...*

190. Caratacus: Tacitus, *Annals* 12.36.2. Tiberius: Dio 57.24.5. Such displays as these were common in the Julio-Claudian period in particular, employed when the emperor needed to remind the senate and the populace of the support he had close at hand; it also reinforced for the guard its special relationship with the emperor. For other examples (under Gaius and Nero) see Dio 59.2.1; Suetonius, *Gaius* 19; Dio 63.4.2–3; Suetonius, *Nero* 13.1; *ibid.* 7.2.

191. Sumner, *Roman Military Clothing I*, p 15, notes that some of the praetorian cloaks may have been fringed on one side. For an image of the open-toed and open-heeled sock see Rankov, *The Praetorian Guard*, p 47.

192. For an example, see Figure 14. For other images see Rankov, *The Praetorian Guard*, *passim*. On the equipment used by the guard, Rankov is standard but see also Bishop and Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment*, *passim*.

193. A crest was found at Vindolanda in 2001 and is the only one that is known; it has not yet been published.

194. Flower, 'A tale of two monuments', pp 635–40. She suggests that the context may have been the visit by Trajan to Puteoli to open a new road. See Figure 4.

195. See Figure 5; Flower, 'A tale of two monuments', figure 10. For other examples see *ibid.*, p 105, n. 72.

196. Rankov, *The Praetorian Guard*, pp 25–7. The scorpion was Tiberius' zodiac sign and Rankov notes that its use by the guard stems from him being their 'second founder'; this title occurs because he brought the cohorts together into the *Castra Praetoria*. See Durry, *Les Cohortes*, pp 205, 213–14.

197. For the Cancellaria relief see Figure 15; cf. also N. Hannestad, *Roman Art and Imperial Policy* (Aarhus, 1988), pp 132–9, with figures 83–5 (identified as legionaries, but clearly praetorians). On the

Anaglypha Traiani/Hadriani see Mary Boatwright, *Hadrian and the City of Rome* (Princeton, 1987), pp 182–90, with figures 40–1. For the ‘Chatsworth’ relief see Diana Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture* (New Haven, 1992), p 251, with figure 218.

198. It should be remembered that equipment was expensive: a letter of Pliny the Younger (6.25) records how he provided his fellow citizen, Metilius Crispus, with 40,000 sesterces for armour and clothing when Pliny had obtained a promotion for him to centurion, but he never heard from him again; it has been suggested that the unit Crispus was going to may have been the guard. See Bishop and Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment*, p 262.

199. RIC I, #464; see Figures 16 and 17. See also Rankov, *The Praetorian Guard*, p 21; Bishop and Coulston, *Roman Military Equipment*, figure 9.1.

200. Rankov, *The Praetorian Guard*, pp 23–4.

201. Dio 79.37.3–4.

202. Rankov, *The Praetorian Guard*, p 61.

203. Speidel, *Riding for Caesar*, passim, prefers to distinguish soldiers close to the emperor as the *equites* in most cases, but such identification is not secure.

204. Rankov, *The Praetorian Guard*, pp 24–5. For an idea of what these standards looked like see Rankov, *The Praetorian Guard*, p 25 (a standard from the funerary relief of Marcus Pompeius Asper, dating to the late first century AD). Images of these standards also can be found on Trajan’s Column and on the Arch of the Silversmiths in Rome.

205. For example, Rankov, *The Praetorian Guard*, p 5: ‘to avoid antagonising the population of Rome and in accordance with Republican custom, the Praetorians did not wear armour when performing such duties [as guarding the emperor] within the city. Instead they wore the rather formal toga, which would still make them conspicuous in a crowd but was a civilian garment and the mark of a Roman citizen.’

206. Tacitus, *Annals* 16.27.1: *at postera luce duae praetoriae cohortes armatae templum Genetricis Veneris insedere; aditum senatus globus togatorum obsederat non occultis gladiis, dispersique per fora ac basilicas cunei militares. inter quorum aspectus et minas ingressi curiam senatores.* The language used for the ‘wedges of soldiers’ (*cunei militares*) technically refers to an offensive formation (that is, one with much depth), or to a division of the army. See also *Agricola* 45.

207. Tacitus, *Histories* 1.38.2: *non ad bellum vos nec ad periculum voco: omnium militum arma nobiscum sunt. nec una cohors togata defendit nunc Galbam sed detinet ...*

208. The Latin is *globus togatorum*. That these are praetorians was suggested, for example, by H. Furneaux in his comments on this passage in *The Annals of Tacitus*, vol. II (Oxford, 1907), and more recently by Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, p 115, n. 90.

209. The fact that the reference occurs in a speech created by Tacitus for Otho also suggests that it need not be taken literally, for the reference may contain an indirect taunt at the guard on the part of the author who resented the praetorians as the most visible instrument of imperial power. See also *Histories* 2.21.4, where Tacitus describes Vitellius' men claiming that their opposition were 'an indolent and listless group of soldiers, corrupted by the circus and theatre'.

210. Though the toga was considered the 'definitive garment of the Roman male' and was restricted to citizens by the middle of the first century AD, its size made it awkward to wear and it had ceased to be popular. See S. Stone, 'The toga: from national to ceremonial costume', in *The World of Roman Costume* (Madison, 1994), p 17. She notes that 'the width of a developed imperial toga of the first century A.D. was fifteen to eighteen feet ... and it was consequently impossible to don the garment without aids ... Its tendency to slip from its draping made it unsuitable for any physical endeavour.' My thanks to Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones for his helpful discussion on togas.

211. Martial, 6.76; Epictetus, *Discourses* 4.13.5.

212. The praetorian prefects had a juridical function from the Julio-Claudian period, though it is not certain under which emperor this process began. See Absil, *Les Préfets*, pp 67–76 (arguing for the process to begin very early, under Sejanus); Passerini, *Le Coorti*, pp 246–51; Durry, *Les Cohortes*, pp 171–6. Claudius is a possible candidate, given the evidence of Tacitus (*Annals* 12.60.1–2), where it is noted that 'The divine Augustus had granted jurisdiction to the knights who governed Egypt and provided that their decrees be treated as if they had been decided by Roman magistrates. Soon, in the other provinces and in Rome, knights were ceded very many cases which used to be investigated by the praetors.' The phrase *equites alias per provincias et in Urbe* has been understood to mean that, along with others of their class, the praetorian prefects 'had already acquired in some degree the jurisdiction which is otherwise attested only at a much later date'. See P.A. Brunt, 'Procuratorial jurisdiction', *Latomus*

25 (1966), p 473. For a second-century example (belonging to the reign of Marcus Aurelius) see Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, p 138. The pinnacle of this development was the appointment of several ‘jurist prefects’ in the early third century, such as Papinian and Ulpian.

213. The terminology used is ‘in private garb’ – that is, not identifiable as a soldier. See Chapter 4.

4. DUTIES

1. Campbell, *Emperor*, p 109.

2. Tacitus, *Annals* 1.7.5.

3. Games: see below. City: Tacitus, *Annals* 12.43.1 (Claudius in the Forum). For other units that complemented the guard in protecting the emperor (*Germani corporis custodies, equites singulares Augusti*) see Chapter 2.

4. See *CIL* 11.395 = *ILS* 2648, translated in Campbell, *The Roman Army*, #90 (Claudius); Suetonius, *Nero* 19 (Nero); Dio 79.5 (Caracalla).

5. A. Cooley and M.G.L. Cooley, *Pompeii: A Sourcebook* (London, 2004), p 188, with numbers G66–69 (tombstones), H59 and *CIL* 4.1711, 1994, 2145, 4311 (graffiti).

6. See Chapter 2. For further examples, cf. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, pp 276–7.

7. As Millar (*The Emperor*, p 64) does: ‘We cannot doubt, however, that the constant presence of armed soldiers had an important influence on what it meant to appear before the emperor, and lent an increased immediacy and force to any sign of imperial displeasure.’ Cf. also Coulston, ‘Armed and belted men’, p 86; Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 276.

8. Dio 68.7.3. Coulston, ‘Armed and belted men’, p 88, sees such visits by the emperor without his guard as a sign of honour, but it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions from the few examples that exist.

9. It is noted by Pliny as well that Trajan could be approached by anyone as he went about his business in the city; cf. *Panegyricus* 24.3. The same is said of Marcus Aurelius; see Herodian 1.2.4.

10. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.52.1.

11. Suetonius, *Nero* 26.1–2; Tacitus, *Annals* 13.25.1–3.

12. As noted by Campbell, *Emperor*, p 113: ‘The character of each emperor and his relationship with the various elements in Roman

society will have helped determine how much the Praetorian Guard was in evidence in Rome. It may not be right to suggest from a few examples that each emperor was accompanied everywhere by troops.'

13. The noun is singular in Tacitus, *Annals* 12.69 and *Histories* 1.29, and in Suetonius, *Otho* 6. See Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 275.

14. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 275: 'après la sieste et avant le dîner du soir'. Martial 10.48.1–2: 'Her attendants announce the eighth hour to the Pharian heifer, and now the cohort armed with pikes returns to quarters as another takes its place.'

15. Tacitus, *Annals* 1.7.5: *nam Tiberius cuncta per consules incipiebat tamquam vetere re publica ... sed defuncto Augusto signum praetoriis cohortibus ut imperator dederat.*

16. In the same passage, Tacitus associates the giving of the watchword with other demonstrations of power: '[Tiberius retained] the watch (*excubiae*), arms (*arma*), the other accessories of court (*cetera aulae*); he was accompanied by soldiers in the forum and in the senate.'

17. Suetonius, *Gaius* 56.2; Dio 59.29.2; Seneca, *De Cons.* 18.3–4; Josephus, *AJ* 19.29.

18. Nero: Suetonius, *Nero* 9; cf also Tacitus, *Annals* 13.2.3. Suetonius records that on the first day of his reign Nero used *Optima Mater* ('the best mother'). Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 275, is in error when he has Agrippina give the watchword in place of Nero. Antoninus: *Historia Augusta*, *Antoninus Pius* 12.6; the word was *aequanimitas* ('equanimity').

19. I would like to thank Ben Sherry for his helpful comments on this episode. The two principal ancient accounts are Suetonius, *Domitian* 16–17 and Dio 67.14.4–18.2. For a modern assessment see Grainger, *Nerva*, pp 1–3; Jones, *Domitian*, pp 193–6.

20. Others taking part included Clodianus, described by Suetonius as a *cornicularius*, that is, the senior clerk, likely for one of the praetorian tribunes or prefects; Maximus, the freedman of Parthenius; Satur, a *cubicularius* ('servant of the bedroom'); and an unnamed gladiator. See Suetonius, *Domitian* 17.2; Dio 67.17.2 (who adds one other, Entellus, the individual in charge of petitions).

21. For example, the emperor is recorded as having lined the walls of the portico where he walked with reflective stone so that he could see what was going on all around him. See Suetonius, *Domitian* 14.4.

22. See, for example, Grainger, *Nerva*, p 19. Dio, 67.15.2, is the

source for this supposition, for he points out that both prefects as well as the emperor's wife, Domitia, had knowledge of the plot, 'so they say'. It is this last phrase that raises suspicion about the veracity of his account, especially since the murder of Commodus as recorded by Herodian (1.17) shows many similarities to Dio's account here, suggesting that such a story – but about a different emperor – was prevalent in the early third century.

23. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 277.

24. Tacitus, *Annals* 13.18.3: *cognitum id Neroni, excubiasque militaris, quae ut coniugi imperatoris olim, tum ut matri servabantur, et Germanos nuper eundem in honorem custodes additos degredi iubet*. Cf. also Suetonius, *Nero* 34.1.

25. Dio 61.8.4.

26. On the conspiracy see Tacitus, *Annals* 13.19–21; Barrett, *Agrippina*, pp 175–8.

27. On Agrippina's murder see Chapter 2.

28. Tacitus, *Annals* 1.24.2; Dio 57.4.3–4.

29. See Tacitus, *Annals* 1.30.1. Details of the chronology of the revolt are provided by Levick, *Tiberius*, pp 72–3.

30. Tacitus, *Annals* 2.16.3; 20.3.

31. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 277.

32. Tacitus, *Annals* 3.2.1.

33. Tacitus, *Annals* 1.17; 27.1. The main complaints of the legionaries were the length of service and their rate of pay in comparison with the guard.

34. The gravity of the situation also may explain the presence of Sejanus. There is no reason for him to have accompanied Drusus as commander of the cohorts, for that responsibility would have been handled by the tribunes, but Tiberius may have sent the prefect along to provide additional support by a high-ranking officer and to show how seriously he himself was taking the matter. Yet, Sejanus is not mentioned again in the account of the events of the mutiny and it is not clear exactly what role he eventually played.

35. Dio 79.23.2. He adds that this led to Domna conspiring with the soldiers, though the text is too corrupt at this point to be certain as to why.

36. Dio 80.19.2. He attributes the employment of this unit to Alexander's mother, Julia Mamaea, and his grandmother, Julia Maesa.

37. Other cases are recorded by Suetonius, *Tiberius* 37.3 (Pollentia) and Dio 55.10a.1 (Cyrenaica; AD 2).

38. Tacitus, *Annals* 4.27.1–2.

39. *Ibid.*, 13.48.

40. See J.H. D'Arms, 'Tacitus, *Annals* 13.48, and a new inscription from Puteoli', in B. Levick (ed), *The Ancient Historian and His Materials: Essays in Honour of C.E. Stevens on his 70th Birthday* (Farnborough, 1975), pp 155–66. Cassius was a senator from the region; cf. Griffin, *Nero*, p 56.

41. These men previously had been legates in the Germanies; they were later called to Greece by Nero and killed. Cf. Dio 63.17.2; Tacitus, *Histories* 4.41.3.

42. Tacitus, *Annals* 13.48. As D'Arms, 'Puteoli', p 157, points out, 'however harsh and intolerable the *remedium* of Cassius Longinus, that of his chosen successors, the Sulpicii Scribonii, was appreciably worse, involving a cohort of the praetorian guard, which brought with it armed conflict, terror and punishment'.

43. Nero may have been concerned that riots in the city would cause disruption elsewhere in Italy. Puteoli had a harbour that was the hub of Rome's eastern imports and exports and was also a resort area. Disorder in the city could have devastated either of these enterprises.

44. On the urban cohorts and their general responsibilities, see below.

45. Tacitus, *Annals* 6.18.1. The year was AD 33.

46. Two examples of executions of plebs by the guard occur in their early history: the first was in connection with riots over tax increases under Gaius; see Josephus, *AJ* 19.24–26; Dio 59.28.11. Additionally, it is possible that the execution of two robbers in the reign of Nero also belongs in this category, though they are of unknown origin; Burrus, as praetorian prefect, was involved, presumably not doing the act himself, but delegating it to his officers. See Seneca, *De Clem.* 2.1.2.

47. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 108; Passerini, *Le Coorti*, p 70; Sheldon, *Intelligence Activities*, pp 122–3. There was also another unit associated with reconnaissance – the *exploratores*, on which see Austin and Rankov, *Exploratio*, *passim*.

48. Speidel, *Riding for Caesar*, p 33: 'The name of the *speculatores* betrays their origin: reconnaissance was so essential to Roman field marshals, and so risky that their reconnoitering force became their bodyguard.'

49. Passerini, *Le Coorti*, p 71; Sydenham, *The Coinage of the Roman Republic*, #1214. The legend reads CHORTIS SPECULATORUM and it was issued in 32/31 BC just prior to Actium. Taken with the other coin minted at the same time but with the legend CHORTIUM PRAETORIARUM (Sydenham, *Coinage*, #1212, 1213) it seems clear that these were two separate units. On the praetorian coin see Chapter 2.

50. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 108. Each legion in the imperial period also had ten *speculatores*, who were assigned to the staff of the governor and functioned as couriers, bodyguards and often as executioners. See, for example, Seneca, *De Ira* 1.18.4, in which a centurion is in charge of the execution of a soldier, but it is the *speculator* who is about to perform the act. Cf. also Le Bohec, *Imperial Roman Army*, p 51.

51. Tacitus, *Histories* 1.25.1. The *tesserarius* was the officer who conveyed the watchword to the rest of the cohort; see Chapter 3. Given that each cohort had a *tesserarius*, the existence of a separate one for the *speculatores* shows not only the existence of a separate cohort, but also may shed light on Dio's assertion that there were ten cohorts of the guard in this period as well. On the question of the number of cohorts see Chapter 3.

52. On their role in Otho's accession see Chapter 2. They are singled out in Tacitus, *Histories* 2.11: 'Otho himself was accompanied by selected corps of *speculatores*, along with the rest of the praetorian cohorts, praetorian veterans and a large number of marines.'

53. Suetonius, *Augustus* 74. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 108, argues that the cohort to which this soldier belonged was contemporary with that of Antony's.

54. *CIL* 6.1921a (= *ILS* 2014) and *CIL* 3.4843 (= *ILS* 2015).

55. *AE* 1976, #18, 21, 22.

56. Speidel, *Riding for Caesar*, p 34, argues that this change of terminology was connected with the bringing together of the guard into a single camp.

57. *CIL* 16.21 (= *ILS* 1993; translated in Campbell, *The Roman Army*, #327), discussed in Chapter 3. Sheldon, *Intelligence Activities*, p 167, argues, based on this document, that these men served as the palace guard during the period of the Flavians, but there is nothing in the diploma to indicate this, nor any other evidence.

58. The idea originated with Domaszewski; cf. Passerini, *Le Coorti*,

p 70, n. 6. As noted in Chapter 3, the *trecenarius* was thought to be one of the senior positions among centurions of the guard.

59. It is of note that 300 is roughly the same number of *speculatores* that were found in the legions under Augustus and so the conjecture may have been an attempt to harmonize these numbers. Speidel, *Riding for Caesar*, p 34, adduces further parallels for the number.

60. Cf. Passerini, *Le Coorti*, pp 71–2; Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 110; Sheldon, *Intelligence Activities*, pp 144, 166.

61. Speidel, *Riding for Caesar*, pp 33–4. As he notes, this helps to explain the episode when Galba nearly was killed by one of these soldiers when the crowd surged forward: ‘A soldier would never wittingly aim his lance at the emperor. But if he used the butt of his lance against an unruly crowd to clear the way, the blade of the weapon might indeed point toward the ruler.’ For this incident see Suetonius, *Galba* 18.

62. Tacitus, *Annals* 6.50.4; see Sheldon, *Intelligence Activities*, p 166.

63. Suetonius, *Gaius* 44.2.

64. Rudich, *Political Dissidence*, p 135: ‘Intuition and common sense ... point to the inevitability, under tyrannical rule, of some kind of a special repressive and investigative machinery. A few scattered hints in our sources do, indeed, imply the operation of a certain network of secret agents in the early Empire.’ Recent work on the epigraphic record for the *speculatores* (and on members of the praetorian and urban cohorts as well) has been undertaken by Giorgio Crimi; see the bibliography for details. To the examples that follow might be added as well the reconnaissance mission to Ethiopia under Nero and a mission to apprehend the governor of Egypt in the reign of Gaius. See Seneca, *NQ* 6.8.3–4; Pliny the Elder, *NH* 6.181–6; 12.19 (Ethiopia); Philo, *In Flaccum* 13.109–15 (Egypt).

65. Dio 52.37.2. The context is the speech of Maecenas to Augustus, advising him on aspects of his rule. Dio uses identical words in his section on Caracalla; see 78.17.1–2.

66. Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 4.43.

67. Suetonius, *Claudius* 35.1: ‘he never dared to go to a banquet unless he was surrounded by *speculatores* with lances and had soldiers performing the role of servants’ (*neque convivia inire ausus est nisi ut speculatores cum lanceis circumstarent militesque vice ministrorum fungerentur*). Cf. also Dio 60.3.3.

68. The date of the creation of the *frumentarii* is late first century,

or early second century AD. Their primary duties were spying and before long executions, but they were also employed as couriers, tax collectors and policemen. On this unit see William Sinnigen, 'The Roman secret service', *CJ* 57 (1961), pp 65–73; Austin and Rankov, *Exploratio*, passim; Sheldon, *Intelligence Activities*, passim; Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire* pp 152–7.

69. Some scholars prefer to see the *frumentarii* replacing the *speculatores* completely with respect to intelligence gathering; see Sheldon, *Intelligence Activities*, pp 167, 251; M. Gichon, 'Military intelligence in the Roman army', in H.E. Herzig and E. Frei-Stolba (eds), *Labor Omnibus Unus. Festschrift Walser. Historia* 60 (1989), p 168. Yet, given the standing of the *frumentarii* – that they were employed both in Rome and in the provinces and therefore there was the possibility of divided loyalties – the continued use of the *speculatores* in the capital is likely. Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, p 114, n. 87, errs in suggesting that Nerva disbanded the *speculatores*; it is clear that they are in existence as long as the guard; see Cowan, *Aspects of the Severan Field Army*, pp 73–7.

70. On occasion the *speculatores* may even have been watching over hostages. Based on Dio 59.28.9, Winterling argues that children and wives of prominent senators were housed in the palace by Gaius in order that the guard might keep an eye on them. See *Caligula*, pp 140–1.

71. Tacitus, *Annals* 2.31.1; cf. also Seneca, *Ep.* 70.10; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 25.1; 3; Dio 57.15.4–5; Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome* 2.129.2, 130.3. For the charges see Richard A. Bauman, *Impietas in Principem. A Study of Treason against the Roman Emperor with Special Reference to the First Century AD* (Münich, 1974), pp 60–1; Robin Seager, *Tiberius* (London, 1972), pp 89–92.

72. A similar situation occurred with Marcus Julius Vestinus Atticus, who got caught up in the aftermath of the Pisonian Conspiracy in AD 65 though he was not involved; when the guard arrived at his house during a dinner party, he took his own life. Tacitus describes Nero's amusement at the thought of Vestinus' dinner companions surrounded by praetorians and not knowing what fate awaited them; see *Annals* 15.68.2–69.3.

73. For background to the case and analysis of it see Harriet Flower, *The Art of Forgetting: Disgrace and Oblivion in Roman Political Culture* (Chapel Hill, 2006), pp 132–8; Victoria Pagán, *Conspiracy Narratives in Roman History* (Austin, 2004), pp 69–72; Miriam Griffin,

‘The senate’s story’, *JRS* 87 (1997), pp 249–63; C. Mackay, ‘“Quaestiones Pisonianae”: Procedural and chronological notes on the S.C. de Cn. Pisone pater’, *HSPH* 101 (2003), pp 311–70.

74. Tacitus, *Annals* 3.14.5; Z. Yavetz, *Plebs and Princeps* (London, 1969), p 28, points to the violent reaction of the people in Rome over the death of Germanicus, in particular their anger with Piso whom they believed to be guilty. It may have been such demonstrations that prompted the use of the guard.

75. Tacitus, *Annals* 3.16.1.

76. Paul Plass, *The Game of Death in Ancient Rome: Arena Sport and Political Suicide* (Madison, 1995), p 93. There has been much debate over the value of suicide before conviction as a method of allowing those who survive to escape further punishment and in assuring that the victim’s will was honoured as suggested by Tacitus (*Annals* 6.29.1–2) and Dio (58.15.2–4). See C. Edwards, *Death in Ancient Rome* (London, 2007), pp 119–21. On political suicide in this period see T. Hill, *Ambitiosa Mors: Suicide and Self in Roman Thought and Literature* (London, 2004), pp 183–212.

77. As Tiberius did in Libo’s case; see Tacitus, *Annals* 2.31.3.

78. See, for example, Tacitus, *Annals* 6.14.2 (Rubrius Fabatus); Suetonius, *Claudius* 29.2, cf. Dio 60.14.2 (ex-consul, not named); Tacitus, *Annals* 16.19 (Petronius); Tacitus, *Annals* 15.60.4–61.4, cf. Dio 62.25.1–2 (Seneca); Tacitus, *Annals* 16.15.1 (Marcus Ostorius Scapula); Tacitus, *Annals* 16.10.2 (Lucius Antistius Vetus).

79. Tacitus, *Annals* 4.67.4.: *quis additus miles nuntios, introitus, aperta secreta velut in annalis referebat* Cf. Barrett, *Agrippina*, pp 36–7; R.H. Martin and A.J. Woodman, *Tacitus: Annals, Book IV* (Cambridge, 1989), p 246. For the background to the situation between Tiberius and Agrippina the Elder see David Shotter, ‘Agrippina the Elder: A woman in a man’s world’, *Historia* 49.3 (2000), pp 341–57.

80. Suetonius, *Tiberius* 64; cf. Pliny the Elder, *NH* 8.145; Philo, *In Flaccum* 3.9. Agrippina the Elder is said to have lost the use of an eye as a result of a beating by the centurion who was in charge of her and was force-fed to prevent suicide by starvation, according to Suetonius (*Tiberius* 53.2). She died, still in exile, in AD 33; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 6.25.3.

81. Suetonius, *Tiberius* 54.2.

82. Plass, *The Game of Death*, p 114.

83. Dio 58.3.8; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 54.2. The brevity of the account in Dio leaves much unanswered, though he does mention the involvement of Sejanus in ensuring that a charge was laid once Drusus arrived in Rome.

84. Drusus died in AD 33, starved to death according to the sources; see Tacitus, *Annals* 6.23.2; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 54.2. Cf. Barrett, *Agrippina*, pp 47–8.

85. *Annals* 6.24.2.

86. See Tacitus, *Annals* 14.60–1, 64.1; cf. Rudich, *Political Dissidence*, pp 69–74.

87. The main prison in Rome was the *carcer* on the slopes of the Capitoline, but there were other prisons by the beginning of the second century AD. Cf. Juvenal, *Satire* 3.312–14; O.F. Robinson, *Ancient Rome: City Planning and Administration* (London, 1992), p 194. On the *carcer* in particular see T.J. Cadoux, ‘The Roman *carcer* and its adjuncts’, *G&R* 55.2 (2008), pp 202–21. Prisons generally were used only for holding defendants or persons who were to be executed, and usually were not intended for long-term incarceration, though this sometimes occurred; cf. F. Millar, ‘Condemnation to hard labour in the Roman empire, from the Julio-Claudians to Constantine’, *PBSR* 52 (1984), p 131.

88. Josephus, *AJ* 18.188–204.

89. See Seneca, *Ep.* 5.

90. The concessions included having those soldiers acting as his guards and, in particular, the officer who was in charge of him to be of a compassionate nature; Agrippa was allowed to go to the baths every day and be visited by his freedmen and friends; see Josephus, *AJ* 18.203.

91. Josephus, *AJ* 18.228–33. These details provide further evidence that there was no bathhouse in the camp and that the centurions had accommodation there, as argued in Chapter 3.

92. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 172; cf. also Nippel, *Public Order*, p 95.

93. Other examples include Mithridates (under Claudius; see Tacitus, *Annals* 12.21), Paul the apostle (under Nero; see *Acts* 28.16; *Philippians* 1.12), and an unnamed Roman citizen in the reign of Trajan (Pliny, *Ep.* 10.57). It is possible that Julius Canus was held in the prison after being sentenced to death by Gaius; he spent ten days between condemnation and execution, to which, along with others, he was led by a centurion. See Seneca, *De Tranquillitate Animi* 14.4–7.

94. A case where the guard was not used is that of Publius Vitellius, accused of collusion with Sejanus. He was released into the custody of his brother, but soon committed suicide. See Tacitus, *Annals* 5.8.2; Suetonius, *Vitellius* 2.3. Given the seriousness of the charge, the fact that he was not put under surveillance by the guard is striking.

95. Dio 72.28.2.

96. Perhaps the incident with Quintus Gallius is the precedent for the use by Augustus; see Chapter 2. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 279, argues that Nero was the one who 'lowered the praetorians to the rank of police and even executioners' but, from the examples given below, it is clear that they had been used in this way from early in their history.

97. Seneca, *De Ben.* 3.26, comments that the treason trials under Tiberius resulted in more deaths than in the civil war. On treason trials in this period see Bauman, *Impietas*, passim; Levick, *Tiberius*, pp 184–5; Miriam Griffin, 'Tacitus, Tiberius and the principate', in I. Malkin and Z.W. Rubinsohn (eds), *Leaders and Masses in the Roman World: Studies in Honour of Zvi Yavetz* (Leiden, 1995), pp 49–57.

98. Tacitus, *Annals* 4.68–70; Pliny the Elder, *NH* 8.145; Dio 58.1.1b–3.

99. Tacitus, *Annals* 6.40.1. The year was AD 36.

100. *Ibid.*, 6.39. The year was AD 35.

101. *Ibid.*, 15.60.4–61.4; Dio 62.25.1–2.

102. On the conspiracy see Barrett, *Caligula*, pp 101–13. Cf. Suetonius, *Gaius* 43, *Vespasian* 2.3; Dio 59.22.6–7. See also Chris Simpson, 'The "conspiracy" of A.D. 39', in C. Deroux (ed), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* 168 (1980), pp 347–66. Lepidus had been married to Gaius' late sister Drusilla and was a close friend, while Gaetulicus was the commander of the armies of Upper Germany.

103. Seneca, *Ep.* 4.7. Cf. Barrett, *Caligula*, p 107.

104. Tacitus, *Annals* 1.53.3–5. Associated in Tacitus with the demise of Julia, both of whom had been in exile for 14 years, he is said to have died in a manner worthy of his family name, not shrinking from offering his neck to the soldiers. No reason is given for his murder, but the connection with Julia was probably sufficient.

105. Suetonius, *Claudius* 29.2. See also Dio 60.14.2. On the number of those executed see B. Baldwin, 'Executions under Claudius: Seneca's *Ludus de Morte Claudii*', *Phoenix* 18.1 (1964), pp 39–48.

106. Tacitus, *Annals* 11.1.3; the language used is *tamquam*

opprimendo bello. For further details, see Levick, *Claudius*, pp 61–4 (who refers to Asiaticus as ‘an active and athletic culprit’ in an attempt to explain the excessive measures taken to arrest him).

107. Dio 61.29.5–6.

108. Tacitus, *Annals* 11.4.3. Rudich, *Political Dissidence*, p 148, refers to Crispinus as ‘active in the prosecution of Valerius Asiaticus’, but there is no evidence that the prefect actually took part in the proceedings.

109. Pliny, *Ep.* 5.5.3, notes that Gaius Fannius was writing a history of people put to death or banished by Nero, and that the unfinished work amounted to three volumes.

110. Tacitus, *Annals* 14.58.2–59.2. The year was AD 62. Cf. Rudich, *Political Dissidence*, pp 68–9. Plautus had been named in connection with the alleged conspiracy of Agrippina in AD 55 mentioned earlier and had been exiled in AD 59; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 13.20.1; 14.22.

111. The number of men sent varies: Tacitus, *Annals* 14.58.4, suggests it is 60 but later (59.2) refers to these soldiers as a maniple, which usually consisted of two centuries. It is obvious that there is some confusion over the exact number, though it seems to be rather sizeable, an indication perhaps of the perceived threat from Plautus.

112. Tacitus, *Annals* 14.57.4; Rudich, *Political Dissidence*, pp 67–8.

113. Suetonius, *Titus* 6. See also Levick, *Vespasian*, pp 192–3.

114. Dio 75.16.3; Suetonius, *Titus* 6.

115. See Suetonius, *Domitian* 10, 11, 15; Dio 67.3.3, 4.5, 9.6, 11.2–13, 12.1–5, 13.1–4, 14.1–3. For a list of these men with a discussion see Jones, *Domitian*, pp 180–8. The use of *delatores* (‘informers’) was widespread by this time and contributed to the sense of unease. On these see Steven H. Rutledge, *Imperial Inquisitions: Prosecutors and Informants from Tiberius to Domitian* (London, 2001).

116. Dio (67.12.5) records that Domitian often visited these prisoners on his own; it might be expected that guard members accompanied him, especially if these men were being held in the prison of the camp.

117. Dio 67.3.4.

118. *Ibid.*, 69.2.5.

119. *Ibid.*, 69.17.1–2.

120. The *Historia Augusta* (*Hadrian* 23.8) ostensibly provides evidence that Servianus was desirous of rule: ‘he had given a dinner

for the imperial slaves, had sat on a stately chair positioned next to his bed and had got up and greeted the soldiers on duty at the palace'. Of the three reasons, the last clearly is the most significant.

121. I disagree with Millar, *The Emperor*, p 63, on the difficulty in ascertaining to which unit those soldiers functioning as executioners belonged. It is the guard which is closest to the emperor and to which such a sensitive responsibility would have been given. Cf. also Nippel, *Public Order*, p 93.

122. Tacitus, *Annals* 13.15.3–16.1. Locusta had been imprisoned under Claudius; see *ibid.*, 12.66.2.

123. As Barrett notes, it was the perception that Nero had murdered Britannicus that was important, not whether the charge was true; see *Agrippina*, p 172.

124. Pollio was promoted soon after to the post of procurator of Sardinia; this 'removed him *per speciem honoris* from the city where he might spread rumours among the guard or serve as a living reproach to the Emperor'. See Miriam Griffin, *Seneca: A Philosopher in Politics* (Oxford, 1976), p 88. Two inscriptions (*CIL* 10.7952 and 10.7863) from Sardinia record Pollio's tenure in the guard and in the urban cohorts.

125. See Suetonius, *Gaius* 23.3; Philo, *Legatio ad Gaium* 30–1; Dio 59.8.2; Barrett, *Caligula*, pp 75–6.

126. Plass, *The Game of Death*, p 94, argues that such action on the part of the person sent to ensure death blurs the distinction between execution and suicide.

127. Tacitus, *Annals* 11.31–8; Suetonius, *Claudius* 26.2, 36.1; Dio 61.31.5. Tacitus' account of the incident is quite dramatic; on this see Katharine von Stackelberg, 'Performative space and garden transgressions in Tacitus' death of Messalina', *AJPh* 130.4 (2009), pp 595–624. For analysis of the episode see G. Fagan, 'Messalina's folly', *CQ* 52.2 (2002), pp 66–79; J. Osgood, *Claudius Caesar. Image and Power in the Early Roman Empire* (Cambridge, 2011), pp 209–11; Levick, *Claudius*, pp 64–7; Bauman, *Impietas*, pp 177–88.

128. Tacitus, *Annals* 11.32.1.

129. *Ibid.*, 11.31.1. Bauman, *Impietas*, p 180: '[The] view of the marriage as an act of usurpation is also implicit in the advice given to Claudius by his *consilium*, to go to the praetorian cohorts and ensure his safety before worrying about revenge.'

130. Tacitus, *Annals* 11.35.2. For the legal aspects of these 'trials',

see Bauman, *Impietas*, pp 186–7.

131. The sources are all in agreement about the involvement of the emperor, though the person who gave the command to the officers was one of Claudius' freedmen, Narcissus; in fact, Tacitus, *Annals* 11.37.1–2, insinuates that the order originated with Narcissus himself, though the freedman attributed it to Claudius. See also Suetonius, *Claudius* 26.2; Dio 60.31.5; Josephus *AJ* 20.149; *BJ* 249. Koestermann, *Cornelius Tacitus*, vol. 3, p 105, argues that the officers sent were members of the palace watch, but since the other events had taken place in the camp, it is likely that these men originated from there as well. It must be noted that although Messalina should have had a contingent of the guard with her during this very long day, there is no indication as to the role they may have played in any of the events that occurred.

132. It is reported that a former slave, Euodus, was sent along to make certain that the order was carried out. This may indicate the uncertainty felt by Narcissus over whether a praetorian officer would be willing to violate his oath of loyalty to the imperial family. Alternatively, it may indicate uncertainty over whether a guard member would obey an order coming from a freedman rather than from his commander.

133. Yet it is instructive that, even three years later, there could be concern on the part of the new empress, Agrippina, over soldiers who still might have residual allegiance to Messalina, and whom she felt compelled to remove from their posts; see Tacitus, *Annals* 12.41.2. For discussion see Chapter 3.

134. Tacitus, *Annals* 1.6.1; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 22.

135. Suetonius, *Augustus* 65.4. See Bingham, 'Life on an island', pp 385–7. Cf. also A.A. Barrett, 'Tacitus, Livia and the evil stepmother', *RhM* 144, pp 171–5.

136. It is not certain with whom the order originated; when the centurion reported to the new emperor that he had carried out his command, Tiberius appeared not to know what he meant. See Tacitus, *Annals* 1.6.3. Tacitus adds that the instructions had been relayed by Gaius Sallustius Crispus, a friend of Tiberius, to a tribune of the guard, who presumably then had passed along the command to his subordinate. It is possible that Augustus had left orders that Agrippa be executed upon his death; Livia is implicated in some of the sources. Yet the only person who had the power to give such an order to the guard was the emperor himself, that is, Tiberius. On the problem of

the origin of the order see Seager, *Tiberius*, pp 48–50; Levick, *Tiberius*, pp 65–6.

137. Tacitus, *Annals* 1.6.1. His statement seems to negate the possibility of independent action on the part of the centurion as presented by Dio (57.3.6). See also Suetonius, *Tiberius* 22, where it is reported that it was a tribune who murdered him.

138. On the oath see Chapter 2.

139. The individual giving this warning is Crispus, whom Tacitus describes here as a ‘participant in the private matters’ (*particeps secretorum*); see *Annals* 1.6.3.

140. Secrecy is evident as well in the case of Clemens, one of Agrippa Postumus’ slaves, who pretended to be his master. He was brought to Rome by Crispus and executed in a secluded part of the palace, probably by a praetorian, given the location and clandestine nature of the murder. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 2.40.2; Dennis Kehoe, ‘Tacitus and Sallustius Crispus’, *CJ* 80 (1984/85), pp 248–51.

141. For the Julio-Claudian period in particular see Bingham, ‘Security at the games’, pp 363–79.

142. For the purposes of this discussion, ‘games’ will refer to everything other than the theatre.

143. J.P.V.D. Balsdon, *Life and Leisure in Ancient Rome* (London, 1969), p 248; V. Olivová, *Sports and Games in the Ancient World* (London, 1984), p 174. David Potter notes that there were 66 days of chariot racing in the fourth century AD; see *The Victor’s Crown: A History of Ancient Sport from Homer to Byzantium* (London, 2011), p 276.

144. Population estimates range from half a million to a million inhabitants for Rome in the imperial period. See Glenn Storey, ‘The population of ancient Rome’, *Antiquity* 71 (1997), pp 966–78; his estimate is half a million. Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, p 115, estimates a million. Of course, there also would have been many visitors from elsewhere at these sorts of events, swelling that number considerably.

145. For the republican period when responsibility for security at these venues fell to the aediles, see Nippel, *Public Order*, pp 21–2. The following section deals only with Rome; security arrangements at events outside of the capital are not at all clear from the sources and there are incidents which suggest that this was lax, for example, at Pompeii in AD 59, on which see Tacitus, *Annals* 14.17.

146. Ulpian, *Digest* 1.12.1.12. Cf. Freis, *Urbanæ*, pp 44–5; Robinson, *Ancient Rome*, pp 197–8. It should be noted that evidence for the presence of soldiers at these events after the first century AD is difficult to find; this may be partly because of the nature of the sources, partly because, as with modern venues, there was always a police presence but it was rarely commented upon.

147. Modern scholars often accept the presence of the guard at these events without further comment; cf. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 278; P. Garnsey and R. Saller, *The Roman Economy, Society and Culture* (Berkeley, 1987), p 158. Nippel, *Public Order*, p 93, notes that either a praetorian or urban cohort was at the games.

148. Josephus, *AJ* 19.76, notes that the crowd was sizeable. He also (*AJ* 19.91) describes Chaerea as taking his place among the tribunes, close to Gaius, which suggests that there were other cohorts in attendance besides Chaerea's own.

149. Josephus, *AJ* 19.119–26, 138–42. It should be noted, however, that the account in Josephus is somewhat incoherent and it is difficult to ascertain the exact chronology of events.

150. Suetonius, *Augustus* 44.1. There is no indication of date but the passage does mention that there had been trouble with the audience. For evidence of soldiers as spectators at the games in the late republic see Suetonius, *Augustus* 14.

151. On the hostility between the people and the military at these venues see, for example, Campbell, *The Roman Army*, p 171; their difficult relationship has already been noted: see Coulston, 'Armed and belted men', pp 89–91.

152. See Magnus Wistrand, *Entertainment and Violence in Ancient Rome, Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia* 56 (Göteborg, 1992), pp 35–6; Alan Cameron, *Circus Factions. Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium* (Oxford, 1976), pp 223–4. There were even periods when actors were banished completely from Rome because of disruptive incidents; see, for example, Tacitus, *Annals* 4.14.3; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 37.2; Dio 57.21.3 (under Tiberius, recalled by Gaius; cf. Dio 59.2.5); Suetonius, *Nero* 16.2 (under Nero, though they had been recalled by AD 60; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 14.21.4).

153. Valerius Maximus 2.4.1. He was writing in the early part of the first century AD.

154. Tacitus, *Annals* 1.77.1; see also Suetonius, *Tiberius* 37.2. It is possible that the violence resulted from restrictions put on actors after

previous disruptions; see Tacitus, *Annals* 1.54.2. Cameron, *Circus Factions*, p 225, notes that the theatre was notorious for ‘rowdyism’, whereas events at the circus did not promote ‘regular and violent brawls’.

155. Balsdon, *Life and Leisure*, p 418, n. 117, argues that the urban cohorts were not used in this instance because ‘the City Prefecture, with command of the urban cohorts, was not yet established’. Yet Tacitus has Lucius Calpurnius Piso as urban prefect by AD 14 at least, and probably a year earlier, and therefore the option of using the urban cohorts clearly was available. See Tacitus, *Annals* 6.11.3. When the first urban prefect was appointed is not clear; Ricci, ‘*In custodiam urbis*’, p 486, n. 7, has the earliest being Marcus Valerius Messalla Corvinus (26 BC), as does Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, p 117.

156. Tacitus, *Annals* 13.24.1–2; cf. Dio 61.8.3.

157. Tacitus, *Annals* 13.25.4.

158. *Ibid.*, 14.15.4–5; cf. Dio 61.20.2.

159. Dio 61.20.2.

160. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.33.3.

161. On *manipuli* see Tacitus, *Annals* 14.59.2, discussed above, and 12.56.2, where it indicates a large number of praetorians at Claudius’ *naumachia*, on which see below.

162. Suetonius, *Nero* 23.2.

163. Tacitus, *Annals* 16.5.1; Suetonius, *Nero* 21.1. Nero had also introduced a group of professional applauders called the *Augustiani* that served as official supporters when he performed. See Tacitus, *Annals* 14.15.5; Suetonius, *Nero* 20.3. It has been suggested that he may have established this group because he was anticipating a negative reaction from the audience; see A. Futrell, *The Roman Games* (Oxford, 2006), p 37. Commodus had a similar group supporting him, as recorded by Dio (73.20.2); cf. Futrell, *The Roman Games*, p 38.

164. Suetonius, *Gaius* 55.1. For the opposite approach, that the spectators were allowed to show their enthusiasm no matter what their preference, see Pliny, *Panegyricus* 33.3–4.

165. Wistrand, *Entertainment and Violence*, p 65; see also Yavetz, *Pebs*, pp 21–4; Futrell, *The Roman Games*, pp 38–42.

166. Futrell, *The Roman Games*, pp 36–42, provides several examples.

167. Grain riots: Tacitus, *Annals* 6.13.1. Demonstrations against the price of grain in AD 19 also occurred at either the theatre or the games. Cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 2.87. Taxes: Josephus, *AJ* 19.24–6 (soldiers not specified, but undoubtedly meant); Dio 59.28.11. It is possible that Suetonius, *Gaius* 41.1, also refers to this incident.

168. Dio 75.4.3–5. This protest seems to have been stage-managed, though Dio attributes it to the gods.

169. Titus: Suetonius, *Titus* 8. Trajan: Pliny, *Panegyricus* 33.

170. Yavetz, *Plebs*, p 10. Cf. also Cameron, *Circus Factions*, p 174. On riots in the imperial period in general see B. Kelly, 'Riot control and imperial ideology in the Roman empire', *Phoenix* 61 (2007), pp 150–76; T.W. Africa, 'Urban violence in imperial Rome', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 2.1 (1971), pp 3–21.

171. Tacitus, *Annals* 16.5.2.

172. Epictetus, *Discourses* 4.13.5. The text dates to the early second century AD.

173. Tacitus, *Annals* 12.56.2; Suetonius, *Claudius* 21.6; Dio 60.33.3–4. On *naumachia* in general see F. Garelli, 'Sport or showbiz? The *naumachiae* in the Flavian amphitheatre', in S. Bell and G. Davies (eds), *Games and Festivals in Classical Antiquity*, BAR 1220 (Oxford, 2004), pp 115–24.

174. Suetonius, *Claudius* 21.3. For a similar incident under Nero see Dio 61.9.1.

175. It is possible that the participation of the praetorians in this activity is associated with procurement of animals for the games, for which there is some evidence of their involvement; cf. C. Epplert, 'The capture of animals by the Roman military', *G&R* 48.2 (2001), pp 210–22, especially pp 212, 219. In the later period, there was a *vivarium* ('game enclosure') managed by the praetorians; see *CIL* 6.130 (= *ILS* 2091), dating to AD 241, for a centurion who was responsible for overseeing the *vivarium* of the city units (*custos vivari coh[ortis] p[ro]p[ri]a aet[er]nae urbis*). The inscription also mentions two hunters from the guard (*venatores immune(s)*). See G. Jennison, *Animals for Show and Pleasure in Ancient Rome* (Philadelphia, 2005 reprint), pp 134, n. 1, 141.

176. Ville, however, considers this use a cost-saving measure, referring to it as an innovation which was 'more spectacular than expensive'. See Georges Ville, *La Gladiature en Occident des Origines à la Mort de Domitien* (Rome, 1981), p 170. Cf. also Balsdon, *Life and Leisure*, p 310; Plass, *The Game of Death*, p 72. Claudius is also said to

have used the guard in a similar fashion at Ostia (against a whale), according to Pliny the Elder (*NH* 9.14–15), who says that the praetorians were providing a show for the public. See Osgood, *Claudius Caesar*, p 183.

177. Suetonius, *Augustus* 43.2; Dio 56.25.7–8. The practice of *equites* taking part in gladiatorial contests is attested under Caesar as well; cf. Suetonius, *Caesar* 39.2; Dio 43.23.4–5. Cf. K. Hopkins, *Death and Renewal: Sociological Studies in Roman History*, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1983), p 12.

178. Hopkins, *Death and Renewal*, p 21.

179. Suetonius, *Augustus* 43.1: ‘On these days [of the games] he stationed guards throughout the city (*custodies in urbe disposuit*), so that it might not be subjected to prowlers because so few people were at home.’

180. Freis, *Urbanae*, p 44; cf. Nippel, *Public Order*, pp 94–5; Sablayrolles, ‘La rue’, pp 139–40, 144. For a summary of their duties see Ricci, ‘*In custodiam urbis*’, pp 490–2. For statistics on how many men were available for security detail in Rome in AD 6 – with interesting modern comparisons – see Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, pp 117–18.

181. On the problem of effective see Freis, *Urbanae*, pp 38–42; Busch, ‘*Militia in urbe*’, pp 315–16. Dio’s numbers – four cohorts, 6,000 men in total – are thought to represent the situation in his own period, though it is not absolutely certain that is the case; see 55.24.6. Because the urban cohorts were housed with the praetorians in the *Castra Praetoria* until the construction of their own camp, the *Castra Urbana*, the controversy over numbers is more significant than it seems at first glance, but no firm conclusion can be made. On the date of the *Castra Urbana* (now thought to be Antonine) see Ricci, ‘*In custodiam urbis*’, pp 488–9.

182. As noted by F. Bérard, ‘Le rôle militaire des cohortes urbaines’, *MEFRA* 100 (1988), pp 159–82.

183. Suetonius, *Gaius* 26.4.

184. *Ibid.*, 55.3.

185. The remit of this individual increased over time, until by Severus’ reign, he ‘had absorbed much of the public-order maintenance and legal jurisdiction traditionally associated with the praetors, aediles, and other traditional republican magistrates’. See Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, p 131; see also Nippel, *Public*

Order, pp 94–6.

186. See, for example, Steven Johnstone, 'On the uses of arson in classical Rome', in C. Deroux (ed), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* 217 (1992), pp 41–57; H.V. Canter, 'Conflagrations in ancient Rome', *CJ* 27 (1932), pp 270–88.

187. Plutarch, *Crassus* 2.

188. Gregory Daugherty, 'The *cohortes vigilum* and the great fire of 64 AD', *CJ* 87.3 (1992), p 229. Cf. also Johnstone, 'On the uses of arson', p 56; Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 18. In fact, a private firefighting unit had been established by Egnatius Rufus, an aedile, in 25 BC. See Nippel, *Public Order*, p 96. It may have been this attempt that spurred Augustus to action in order to keep control in his own hands: in 22 BC, after a particularly devastating fire, he instituted a corps of 600 slaves who were given the responsibility of extinguishing fires; in 19 BC, they were ordered not only to put out the fires but also to prevent their outbreak. See Dio 54.2; 53.24.4–5.

189. Dio 55.26.4; Suetonius, *Augustus* 25.2, 30.1; Strabo 5.3.7; Appian, *BCiv* 5.132 (who has the incorrect date for the formation).

190. Other reasons are given by J.S. Rainbird, *The Vigiles of Rome*, unpublished dissertation, University of Durham, 1976, p 219: too few Roman citizens willing to do the job; using slaves might cause insurrection; *collegia* were not trustworthy. There is evidence, however, for citizens joining the corps, though this is rare; see Rainbird, *The Vigiles*, p 220.

191. Coulston, 'Armed and belted men', p 89, argues that they were considered soldiers, while Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, p 117, refers to them as a 'military fire brigade'. Others such as G.R. Watson, 'The pay of the urban forces', *Acta of the 5th Epigraphic Congress* (1967), p 413, and Le Bohec, *Imperial Roman Army*, p 22, suggest that it is unlikely that they were a military unit.

192. Rainbird, *The Vigiles*, p 447, concludes that they 'were more soldiers than firemen' but his main support for this contention is their organization, which set them apart from other fire brigades in the ancient world.

193. Ulpian, *Digest* 37.13.1.

194. Watson, 'The pay of the urban forces', pp 414–15.

195. Tacitus, *Annals* 1.8; 4.5.

196. Rainbird, *The Vigiles*, pp 229–37.

197. The claim by Robinson, *Ancient Rome*, p 185 and n. 85, that the *vigiles* twice were sent by Augustus to fight in battle is a misunderstanding of Suetonius, *Augustus* 25. Of course, their involvement in the civil war of AD 69 must be acknowledged, but the circumstances are unusual; it might be expected that every imperial unit be called up for one side or the other.

198. It is only in the officer class that movement between the city cohorts can be discerned, as was noted in Chapter 3.

199. See Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 18.

200. Rainbird, *The Vigiles*, p 298. Daugherty, '*Cohortes vigilum*', p 230, remarks on the scarcity of information about these prefects: 'for the entire three centuries of the existence of the *cohortes* we know the names of 43 prefects, only seven of whom are ever mentioned by historians, and then for reasons other than firefighting'.

201. Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, pp 131–2.

202. J.S. Rainbird, 'The fire stations of imperial Rome', *PBSR* 54 (1986), p 148; see also Sablayrolles, 'La rue', pp 140–1. Cf. Dio 57.19.6. The city had been divided into regions in 7 BC; see Dio 55.8.6.

203. For an estimation of the strength of the *vigiles* see Rainbird, 'Fire stations', pp 150–1. The number of men per cohort is not clear, but was either 560 or 1,000. The difficulty in estimating their number comes from the late date of most of the evidence. By the third century, the *vigiles* numbered 7,000, and much of our information – especially from inscriptions – comes from that period.

204. Of these fires, 20 would be large and two serious, according to Rainbird, *The Vigiles*, p 376. See Juvenal, *Satire* 3.197–202, on the dangers of fire in the crowded areas of the city. Cf. also Edwin S. Ramage, 'Urban problems in ancient Rome', in Ronald T. Marchese (ed), *Aspects of Graeco-Roman Urbanism: Essays on the Classical City* (1983), pp 74–9.

205. Rainbird, *The Vigiles*, p 443.

206. See, for example, Daugherty, '*Cohortes vigilum*', pp 231, 238; Johnstone, 'On the uses of arson', p 61; Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, p 117 (though caution over the date of the evidence is pointed out in note 95).

207. Rainbird in fact states unequivocally that 'the *Vigiles* were not a police force'. See *The Vigiles*, p 444, and his 'Fire stations', p 151: 'We do not need to seek an explanation for the large number of *vigiles*

in anything other than firefighting. Even if they did have minor policing duties, their firefighting duties had to take priority as fire develops quickly. Their method of patrolling would probably appear police-like to the modern reader.’ Cf. also Nippel, *Public Order*, pp 96–7. For an example, albeit a fictional one, the appearance of the *vigiles* at Trimalchio’s party is informative: drawn by the noise, they broke down the door, not because of the disruption, but because they thought the house was on fire. Cf. Petronius, *Satyricon* 78.7.

208. *CIL* 14.4494 (= *ILS* 9494; translated by Campbell, *The Roman Army*, #61):

. u | . . militi cohor. VI pr., | Ostienses locum sepult. |
dederunt | publicoque funere efferen. | decrerunt | quod in incendio |
restituendo interit. |

(... soldier of the sixth praetorian cohort. The citizens of Ostia gave a place for his burial and decreed that he be buried with a public funeral because he died while putting out a fire.)

This inscription led Durry to suggest that the sixth praetorian cohort may have been stationed in Ostia prior to being united with the other cohorts in Rome, but the evidence is tenuous. See Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 44; cf. also Rainbird, ‘Fire stations’, p 157. There are four inscriptions which mention the sixth praetorian cohort in association with Ostia (*CIL* 14.215, 223, 4494, 4495) but 4494 is the only inscription securely dated to the period of Augustus.

209. Seneca, *NQ* 1.15. It is not clear from the text (*cohortes*) whether these men were from the guard or the *vigiles*, or maybe a combination of the two.

210. Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.2. The type of unit is not identified in the text; *vigiles*, urban cohort and naval unit all have been suggested. In fact, it may be the urban cohort that was moved in AD 69 by Otho, as suggested by Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 12, n. 6, followed by Rainbird, ‘Fire stations’, p 157. Ricci, ‘*In custodiam urbis*’, p 487, argues that the lack of specification makes it impossible to identify the unit.

211. Suetonius, *Tiberius* 50.3. The date has been estimated to be AD 16; see Werner, *De Incendiis*, p 15.

212. Dio 57.14.10: the joke is that, when asked for water, Drusus replied, ‘Give it to them warm’ – as wine was often served with warm water, this was an indication of how heavy a drinker he had become.

213. Tacitus, *Annals* 3.72.3; cf. Dio 57.21.3, who remarks that this recognition was unusual, since Tiberius previously had honoured

other men with statues only after their deaths. Interestingly, Velleius Paterculus, in his brief account of the fire (*History of Rome*, 2.130.1), does not mention Sejanus at all.

214. Dio 59.9.4; cf. Durry, *Les Cohortes*, p 278.

215. Suetonius, *Claudius* 18.1; cf. Dio 60.33.12. Agrippina, his wife, was with Claudius; cf. Barrett, *Agrippina*, p 130. Mottershead, *Suetonius, Claudius*, p 73, argues for there to be urban cohorts present as well – for crowd control – with the praetorians there only to guard the emperor. Yet it is more likely, since the fire raged for two days, that as many cohorts as were available in Rome would have participated in combating it, especially since Claudius is said to have paid as well for the services of the plebs to fight the blaze; see Canter, ‘Conflagrations’, p 275.

216. Griffin, *Nero*, p 129.

217. Dio 62.17.1. Cf. also Suetonius, *Nero* 38.1; Tacitus, *Annals* 15.38.7.

218. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.38.3.

219. Daugherty, ‘*Cohortes vigilum*’, p 233: ‘The accounts of Dio, Tacitus, and Suetonius reflect active efforts at fire suppression by one of the few effective methods open to firefighters of the day: containment by demolition or backfire.’

220. On these counter-fires see Tacitus, *Annals* 15.40.2.

221. Daugherty, ‘*Cohortes vigilum*’, p 233.

222. Pliny, *NH* 17.5; Tacitus, *Annals* 15.38.1; Suetonius, *Nero* 38.1. Cf. also Statius, *Silvae* 2.7.60–1; Seneca, *Octavia*, 831–3; Dio 62.16.1–2.

223. Tacitus, *Annals* 15.43. On the social and economic impact of the fire see R.F. Newbold, ‘Some social and economic consequences of the A.D. 64 fire at Rome’, *Latomus* 33 (1974), pp 858–69.

224. Dio 73.24.3. The fire occurred late in Commodus’ reign.

225. As Johnstone, ‘On the uses of arson’, pp 52–3, notes: ‘the Romans left no comprehensive record of fires in their city. Our knowledge of them must be culled from incidental references in literature and, most especially, brief citations in histories ... fires which concerned powerful men, consumed public buildings, or impinged on the state were most likely to be reported.’

226. Cf. Johnstone, ‘On the uses of arson’, pp 60–1: ‘fire fighting ... was not so specialized that other troops could not do it effectively ...

any might fight fires, all asserted the emperor's substantial presence'. One might adduce a modern parallel in this context, for even today at fires which threaten a large area, and especially those which threaten residential communities, the army is occasionally brought in to supplement those firefighters employed by the state.

227. As noted earlier, they had taken part in the battles of AD 69: they fought on the side of Vespasian along with the urban cohorts, commanded by the urban prefect (also Vespasian's brother), Titus Flavius Sabinus. See Tacitus, *Histories* 3.64; 69.

228. See, for example, Velleius Paterculus, *History of Rome*, 2.127–8. On Sejanus' early career see Chapter 3.

229. Many modern scholars have accepted at face value the entire story of Sejanus' fall. See, for example, Winterling, *Caligula*, pp 29–31.

230. On the reasons for Tiberius' retreat from Rome see Levick, *Tiberius*, p 167; Birley, 'Sejanus', p 137. As noted above, Sejanus made use of the praetorians to convey imperial correspondence and, no doubt, to report back to him matters of importance on Capri; cf. Tacitus, *Annals* 4.41.2; Dio 58.4.2.

231. Sejanus was not the only official that Tiberius relied on. For example, Seneca, *Ep.* 83.14, comments that, when he withdrew to Campania, Tiberius entrusted Piso, the urban prefect, with some sort of secret orders. Cf. Passerini, *Le Coorti*, p 273; Syme, *Augustan Aristocracy*, p 343.

232. The existence of a plot by Sejanus against Tiberius is a vexed issue. The main source for a conspiracy is Josephus, *AJ* 18.181–2. There are few other references: Juvenal, *Satire* 10.69–72; Tacitus, *Annals* 5.8.1, 5.11.1, 6.14.1, 6.19.2, 6.47.2, possibly also 6.3, 6.8.3, 6.8.6, 6.23.2; Suetonius, *Tiberius* 61.1, 75; possibly also *Vitellius* 2.3. Perhaps the most interesting is that of the contemporary, Valerius Maximus, who never names Sejanus but alludes to treason; see 9.11.4. Given the date of publication so soon after Sejanus' demise, Valerius clearly is repeating the official version. On the other hand, Dio (whose account is complete) records that Sejanus was uncertain as to his position with Tiberius by AD 31, but he did not think to attempt to overthrow the emperor, since he continued to be held in esteem and realized that the people were supporting Gaius; see 58.6–8. For a summary of the most prominent modern theories see Birley, 'Sejanus', pp 129–34.

233. Dio 58.11.4.

234. Dio 58.4.1 mentions that Tiberius feared that Sejanus might be proclaimed emperor in his place, but this must be predicated on Dio's own experience of the emperor Septimius Severus and his praetorian prefect Plautianus; see, for example, Dio 76.14.6. As J. Edmondson, *Dio: The Julio-Claudians* (London, 1992), p 118, notes, 'a large part of the senatorial order and the Roman plebs were very much opposed to Sej[anus] ... it serves D[io]'s artistic purposes to magnify Sej[anus]' position to the highest degree, so that his subsequent fall appears all the more dramatic'.

235. See Birley, 'Sejanus', pp 141–9.

236. What Dio says (58.9.5) is that Macro sent back to their camp 'those members of the guard who happened to be with Sejanus and at the senate'; the Greek is quite general here, with no specific word for 'guarding', though most translators conclude that is what these men are doing for Sejanus based on them being praetorians.

237. Dio 58.9.5–6.

238. For views on Macro's role see Birley, 'Sejanus', pp 144–9; Hennig, *L. Aelius Sejanus*, pp 151–6.

239. There is epigraphic evidence of Macro's promotion from prefect of the *vigiles* to praetorian prefect, but no indication of the date of the move. See *AE* (1957), 250; de Visscher, 'L'amphithéâtre d'Alba Fucens', pp 39–49; de Visscher, 'La carrière', pp 168–79. In a later article, de Visscher proposed that Macro was *praefectus vigilum* by AD 24, though there is no direct evidence for the date; see F. de Visscher, 'Macro, préfet des vigiles et ses cohortes contre la tyrannie de Séjan', *Mélanges A. Piganiol* II (Paris, 1966), p 766.

240. F. Cramer, *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics* (Philadelphia, 1954), pp 105–6; see also Birley, 'Sejanus', p 147. The marriage occurred in either AD 29 or 30.

241. On Sejanus as consul see Chapter 3. Hennig, *L. Aelius Sejanus*, p 153, remarks on the practical difficulty of Macro simply changing commands overnight, as recorded by Dio (58.9.2–3) and argues therefore that he had become the substitute commander of the guard at the beginning of Sejanus' consulship. But in the early third century, Septimius Severus appointed his praetorian prefect Plautianus consul; it is clear that he held both offices concurrently. Given the rarity of the same individual holding both posts, it is difficult to see why Sejanus could not have done the same. On Plautianus see Dio 76.15.2.

242. That there had been a power struggle was suggested by de

Visscher, 'Macro, préfet des vigiles', pp 761–8. But cf. Hennig's criticisms in *L. Aelius Sejanus*, p 153, n. 77. That Macro was in charge on Capri was suggested by Koestermann, *Cornelius Tacitus*, p 364. See also Hennig, *L. Aelius Sejanus*, p 154.

243. Barrett, *Caligula* p 28. Macro continued to serve as prefect under Gaius; see Chapter 2.

244. Dio 58.12.1–2.

245. See Tacitus, *Annals* 6.2–3; Dio 58.18.4. Clearly Tiberius did not trust the praetorians after the initial charge.

246. As Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, p 125, notes, 'This ugly business of destroying personal enemies highlights the praetorians' main purpose of safeguarding the emperor and his family. It behooved them to advance the emperor's interests, no matter how heinous.'

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1. A Roman Emperor AD 41 (detail) by Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1871). Image courtesy of the Art Renewal Center® www.artrenewal.org.



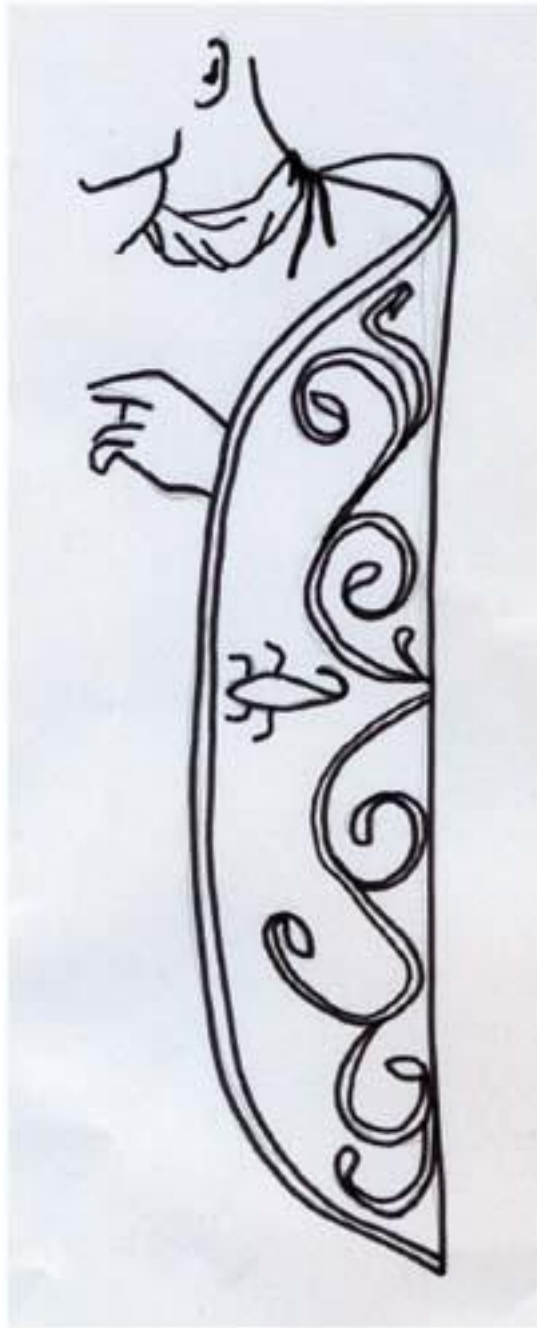
2. ‘Claudius summoned’ by Lawrence Alma Tadema (1867). Image



3. Aureus of Claudius (first issued AD 41–42) showing the praetorian camp with a figure holding a spear and shield standing in front of a standard. Drawing by Stephen Copp.



4. The Puteoli frieze, possibly from an arch of Trajan. Drawing by Stephen Copp.



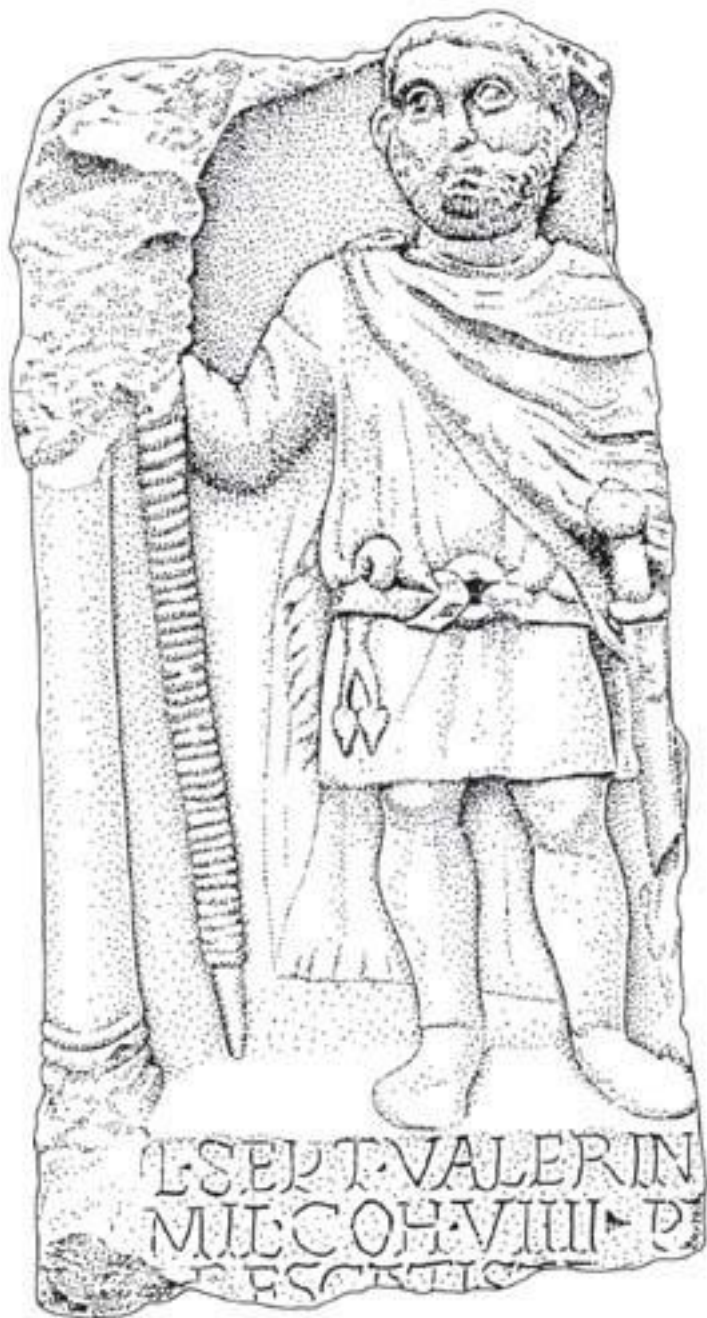
5. Details of one of the shield emblazons from the Puteoli frieze.
Drawing by Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones.



6. Scene V from Trajan's Column, with the praetorians on the march across the Danube. Photo courtesy of H. R. Goette.



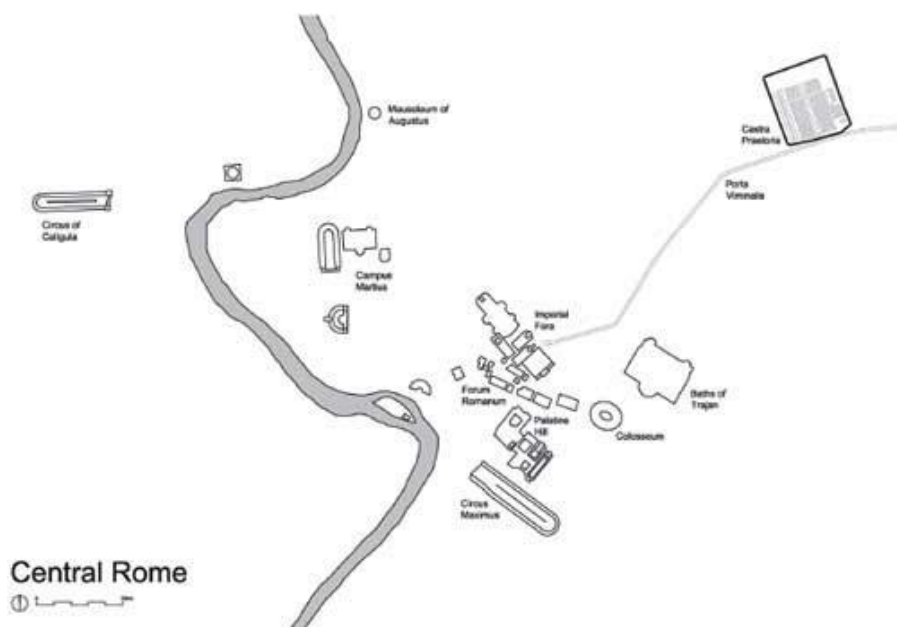
7. Antoninianus of Gallienus, dating to AD 258, celebrating the praetorian guard; the legend reads COHH PRAET VI P VI F. Drawing by Stephen Copp.



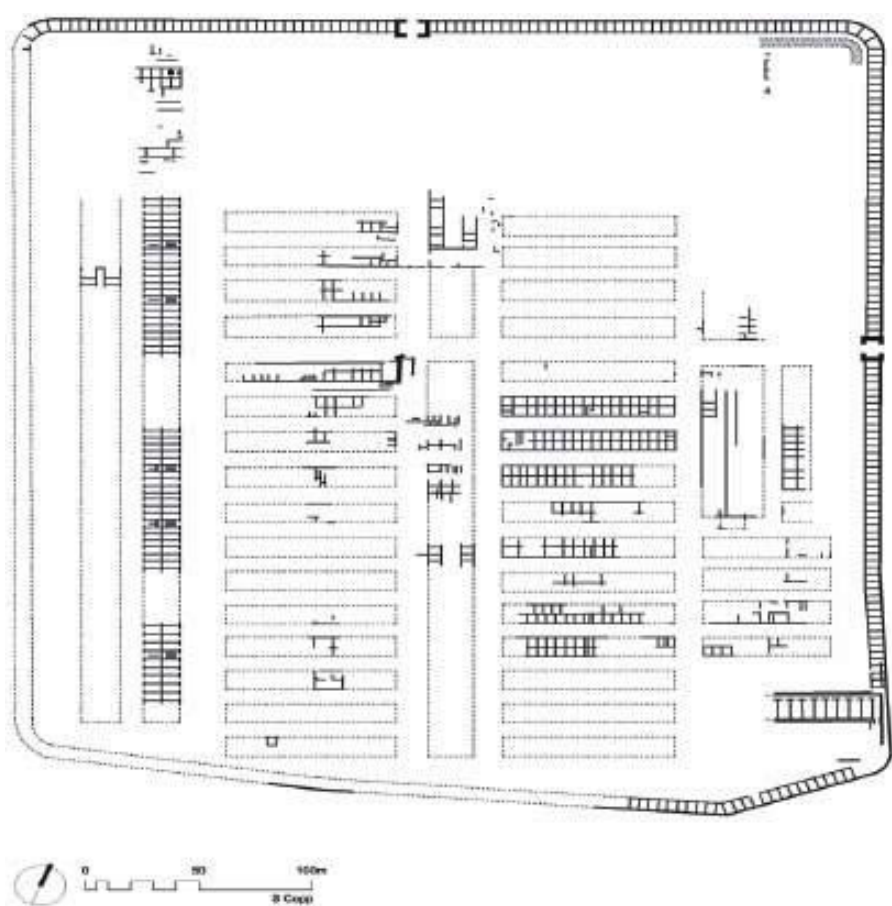
8. Tombstone of Lucius Septimius Valerinus (third century AD).
Drawing courtesy of S. James.



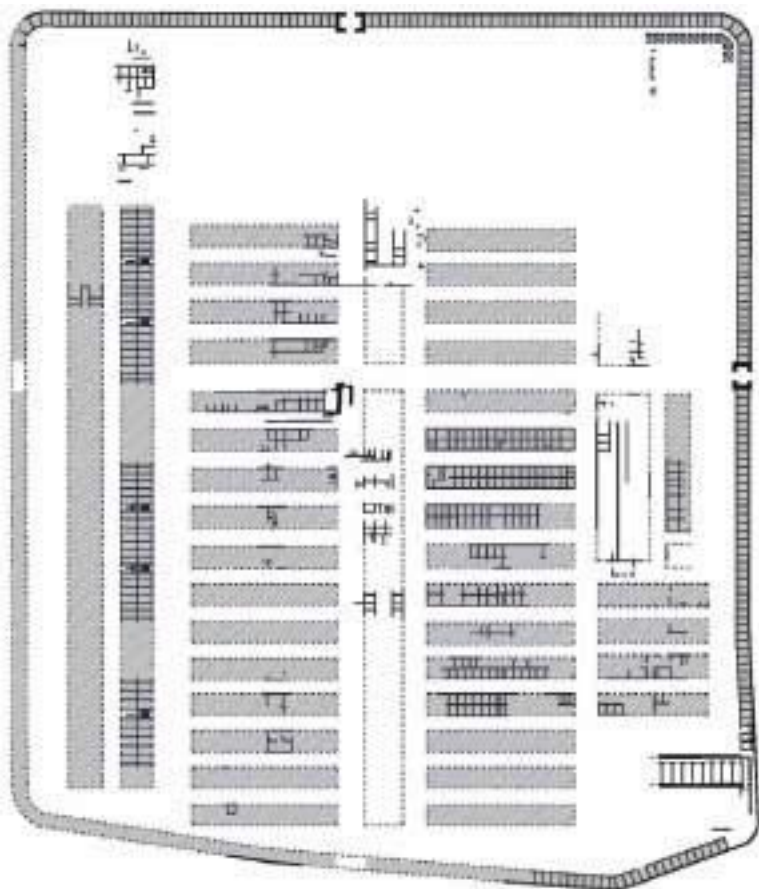
9. Military diploma for a soldier of the Vth praetorian cohort, dating to AD 246. © The Trustees of the British Museum.



10. Map of Rome, showing the location of the Castra Praetoria in relation to the Forum and the Palatine. Plan by Stephen Copp.



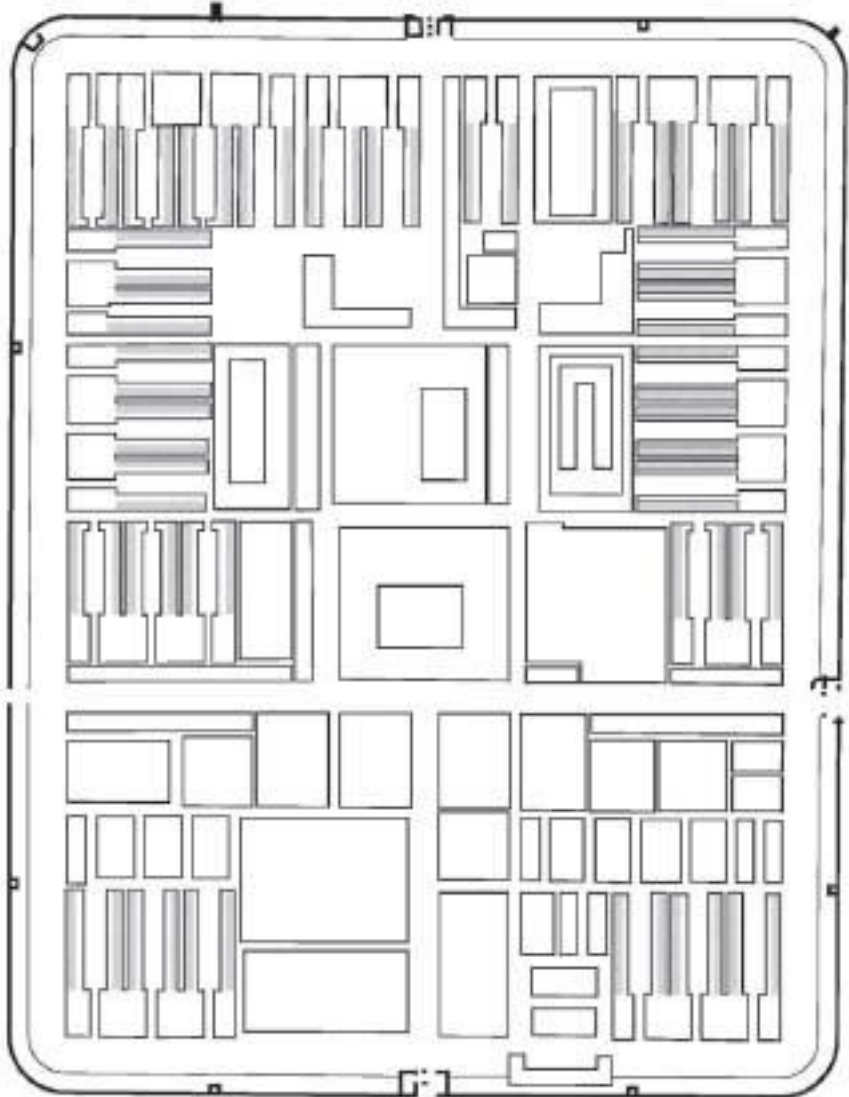
11. The Castra Praetoria: excavated building remains and extrapolated structures. Plan by Stephen Copp.



0 50 100m
5 Copp

CASTRA PRAETORIA & LEGIONARY FORTRESS AT NOVAESEUM

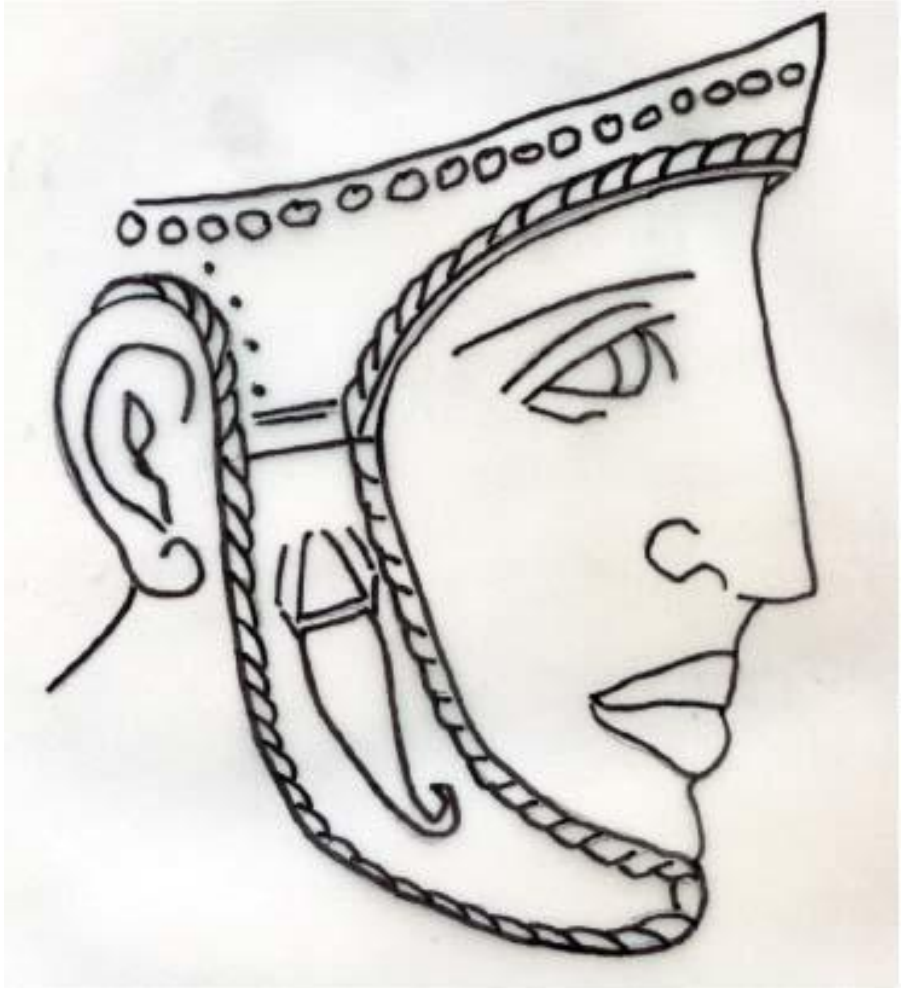
Hatching indicates location of contubernia



12. The Castra Praetoria and legionary fortress at Novesium (hatching indicates location of *contubernia*). Plan by Stephen Copp.



13. (a) The Louvre relief, possibly from the Arch of Claudius (AD 51); much restored. © Louvre/The Bridgeman Art Library.



13. (b) Drawing of the scorpion cheek-piece (soldier in the middle at the back in 13(a)) by Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones.



14. Relief from the Arch of Marcus Aurelius (AD 176–80) showing praetorian soldiers in full armour. Photo courtesy of H. R. Goette.



15. Panel from the Cancelleria reliefs (late first century AD) with praetorians in tunic and *paenula* (travelling cloak). Photo courtesy of H. R. Goette.



16. Sestertius of Gaius (issued AD 40–41) addressing the praetorians.
Drawing by Stephen Copp.



17. Sestertius of Galba (AD 68) addressing the praetorians. Drawing by Stephen Copp.

'Sandra Bingham's new book is an attractively written assessment of a military force which was central to political events at Rome, providing close protection for the emperor and his family, and accompanying him in his campaigns on the frontiers. The author's compelling narrative brings before us the officers and soldiers on duty at the imperial palace and in their fortified encampment on the outskirts of the city. This is a most welcome evocation of the praetorians and their world that will appeal to specialists and general readers alike.'

– LAWRENCE KEEPIE, Emeritus Professor of Roman History and Archaeology, University of Glasgow

'Sandra Bingham explores the idea that the praetorians were much more than the emperor's bodyguard. They had a role in maintaining state security, policing large gatherings, fire-fighting, arresting and sometimes executing suspects, and occasionally even spying for the emperor. Bingham's fast-paced though carefully constructed narrative, backed up by sound analysis of crucial issues, expertly conveys the reader through this blood-thirsty and exciting tale, which highlights important issues in the wider history of the Roman world. Detailed notes make the book a valuable tool for students and scholars, while general readers will welcome its crisp and clear style and eye for intriguing details of life in the guard.'

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